The New Criterion

September 1987

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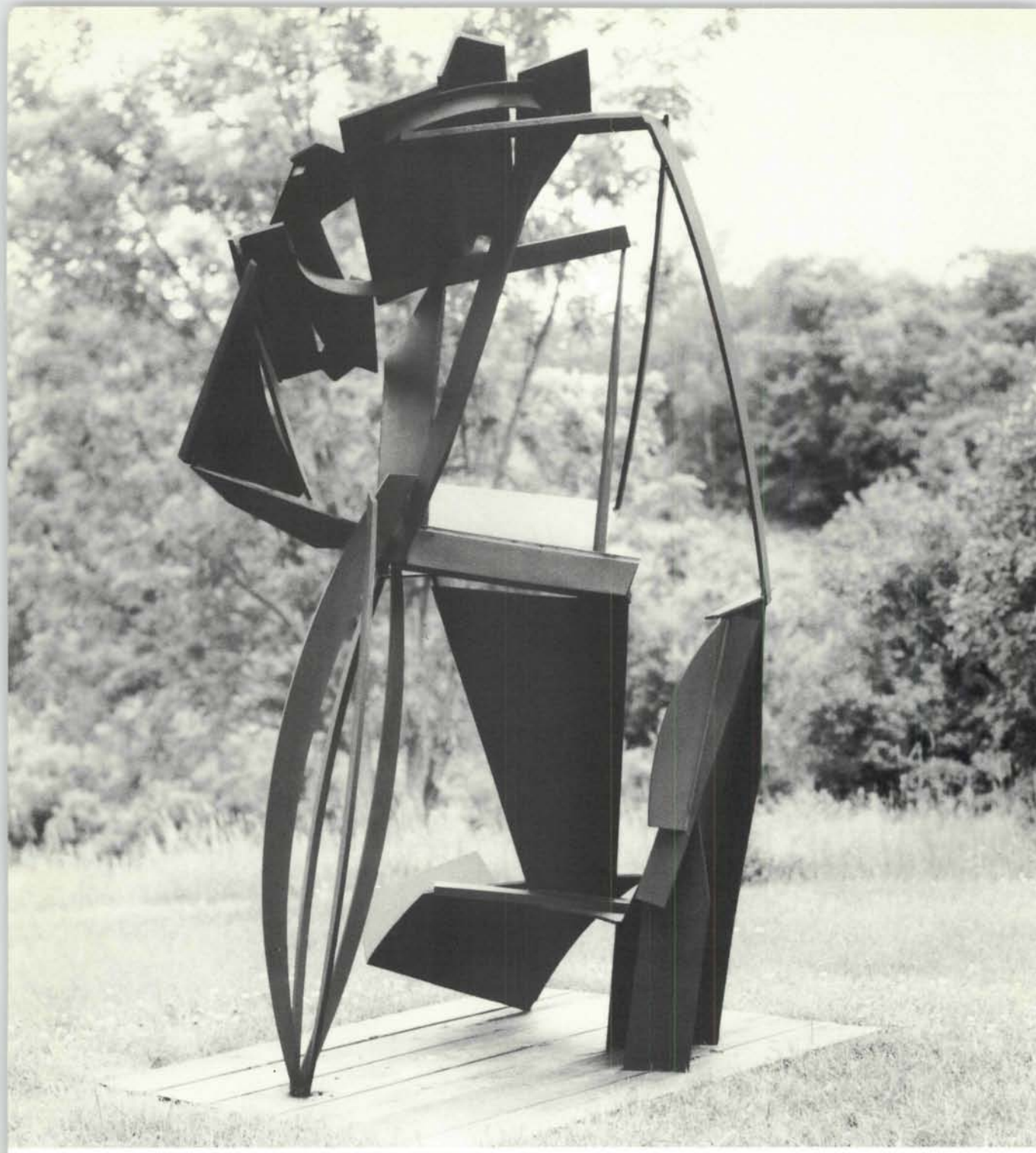

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Is the symphony orchestra dead?

by Samuel Lipman

In matters affecting the future of high culture, it is often difficult to tell the friends of art from its enemies. Art is a shibboleth, an unexamined good in whose service—and in the solving of whose problems—many can prosper. Whether what is good for art's advocates is in fact also good for art is a murky matter.

These days, the attention of the well-wishers of art is beginning to fasten on the plight of serious music. There are many elements in this plight: a decline in audience sophistication, at once caused by and resulting in an increased concentration on already-known and crowd-pleasing repertory; the complete failure over the past half century of avant-garde composition, both acoustic and electronic, to win a place in the minds of musicians and in the ears of serious music-lovers; the almost total loss of confidence in the idea that the writing of music is a craft requiring fundamental and structured training; a shortage of new performing celebrities perceived to be of historical importance; the continuing encroachment of academic musicology on the standard repertory, an encroachment (in the manner of the killer bees) now progressing into Beethoven and moving forward in time at the rate of a decade every five years or so; a management revolution in which administrators are replacing practicing musicians as artistic policy makers; and finally the weakening of any future audience through the inability of our society to prescribe a serious course of education for the young in the humanities, including the study of great music.

All of these circumstances are now focused on the symphony orchestra, the most successful, visible, and vulnerable of our musical institutions. The success, the visibility, and the vulnerability alike stem from the massive expansion orchestras have enjoyed over the past few decades. In a process that began as long ago as the late 1930s, American orchestras have grown in number to the point where there is now hardly an area anywhere in the country not served by a locally supported symphonic ensemble. The statistics are indeed impressive. According to the American Symphony Orchestra League, in the 1984-85 concert season, 19,969 symphony concerts took place in this country. These concerts were attended by 23.7 million people, with an average attendance per concert of 1,187. As the number of concerts has increased, so have the budgets for orchestras large and small. Our greatest orchestras are now projecting annual expenditures approaching twenty million dollars and more. In order to fund these large sums, increased ticket sales have become the object of strenuous marketing efforts, and orchestra development directors have built fund-raising networks stretching from government and corporations down to a vast number of small individual contributors.

But symphony orchestras are not just about institutional success. Even in the most cynical analysis, they are also—and

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even primarily—about the communication of great music. And despite their gains in frequency of activity and scale of operation, American orchestras are now widely seen to be beset by troubles. Overall, the playing of our best ensembles seems rather less tonally integrated and refined than in the past; in the most rosy assessment, a general gain in reliability has been offset by the tendency for different orchestras to sound alike rather than artistically distinct. But the most immediate troubles have been financial, usually triggered by difficult labor negotiations in which management cannot meet union demands or finds it necessary to ask for substantial concessions from the players. In recent years, regionally significant orchestras in Dallas, Denver, Kansas City, Phoenix, and San Diego either have threatened to suspend operations for a time or have actually done so; in the case of the Oakland (California) Symphony Orchestra, this suspension remains in force at the present time. Even so important a major orchestra as St. Louis, led by the popular and vital music director Leonard Slatkin, has not been immune to the threat of financial disaster.

For the large majority of orchestras not as yet in parlous financial straits (though even here high wage costs and restrictive work rules exert strong pressures on balance sheets), profound and nagging questions about artistic purpose can no longer be hidden in the clouds of self-congratulation and local boosterism. Like most basic questions, those that affect orchestras are simple to formulate, albeit difficult to answer: What do orchestras do? For whom do they exist? Why should they be supported? Each of these questions, and all of them together, must be answered in the context of the plight of serious music today.•

A significant contribution to this debate has recently been made by no less a figure than Ernest Fleischmann, since 1969 the respected and eminent executive director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra and general director of the Hollywood Bowl. Born in Germany in 1924, Mr. Fleischmann grew up in South Africa, where he was both a music critic and a conductor. In 1956, he was named director of music and drama for the Johannesburg Festival. From 1959 to 1967 he was general manager of the London Symphony Orchestra, and in the two years before coming to Los Angeles he served as the director of the classical division in Europe of Columbia Records. Energetic and outspoken, Mr. Fleischmann has been active in bringing new European conductors and soloists to the United States, and he was a major force in securing Carlo Maria Giulini and André Previn for the Los Angeles Philharmonic; he has also been associated with the practice of bringing enormous audiences into the Hollywood Bowl through the programming of blockbuster film scores and the staging of lavish light shows.

Mr. Fleischmann's thoughts on the orchestral situation are contained in a widely circulated address he delivered on May 16 of this year at the commencement exercises of the Cleveland Institute of Music. It must be said that the positions taken in this speech gain added weight from their having been delivered from the platform of such a prestigious institution, an institution closely associated throughout its history with the great Cleveland Orchestra of George Szell, Lorin Maazel, and now Christoph von Dohnányi.

Mr. Fleischmann's position certainly has the virtues of simplicity and directness. Calling his speech "The Orchestra is Dead. Long Live the Community of Musicians," he begins by agreeing with Pierre Boulez's call more than two decades ago to burn the opera houses, and with Gunther Schuller's harsh characterization, in a 1980 speech at Tanglewood, of the life the orchestral musician. In Schuller's words, as quoted by Mr. Fleischmann, orchestral musicians are "embittered, disgruntled and bored. They've come to hate music, are apathetic and cynical. They have no spiritual identification with the scores they play."

Going beyond this verdict, Mr. Fleischmann finds that with the rise of union consciousness among the musicians the conflict

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between players and management has become a "them and us" situation. Even worse, he finds players everywhere frustrated by uninteresting repertory, poor conductors, inadequate halls, insufficient remuneration, and excessive tension. "No life for a real musician this," he says, "with little opportunity to develop as an artist, let alone as a human being." He notes that the situation in Europe is little better. "Why the hell," he asks, "should anyone then contemplate an orchestral career?"

He answers his own question by noting that with goodwill and co-operation on everyone's part, life can be made "truly stimulating for the musicians and richly rewarding for our audiences"—if we acknowledge that "the orchestra as we know it is dead," and begin to change its shape, structure, schedules, duties, and repertory. After remarking once again on the shortage of inspiring and knowledgeable conductors—and adding to the list a shortage of similarly equipped administrators—he gives a cogent analysis of the dull, routine, but always pressure-ridden process by which every year orchestra programs all across the country achieve their predictable and homogenized repetitions of the familiar and the banal. He points, too, at a little-admitted fact: many subscribers, despite their willingness to buy tickets, often end up unwilling to attend the concerts for which they have paid.

Mr. Fleischmann again asks what can be done to remedy the situation. His answer is to turn "the rather rigid structure of the symphony orchestra . . . into a more flexible Community of Musicians." This new grouping would no longer be a band of approximately a hundred musicians, divided in traditional ways among strings, winds, brass, and percussion. Now in place would be a complement of around a hundred and fifty musicians, with extra players for each instrument. He interrupts his recommendations to explain how this larger group would be funded: by consolidating the number of orchestras in each metropolitan area, and in particular by "eliminating one or more of the best ensembles [in the area] and merging them into a pool of 140-150 musicians under one expert administration, that will reduce administrative costs and rationalize fundraising and marketing activities."

As examples of the proposed consolidation, Mr. Fleischmann mentions "hypothetically, or better still, metaphorically" the merging of the Orchestra of St. Luke's with the New York Philharmonic, or, closer to (Mr. Fleischmann's) home, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. These combinations would, of course, still need a music director, but they would also need a conductor to oversee new-music programs and still another to direct chamber-orchestra concerts. What he calls this "golden pond" of musicians could then be divided and re-divided to form a full symphony orchestra, a chamber orchestra, and a new-music ensemble, in addition to various string quartets, wind quintets, and brass ensembles.

In Mr. Fleischmann's vision, the full orchestra would play only twelve programs a year rather than twenty-four to thirty, with each program rehearsed from four to eight times, rather than the present maximum of four. Because of the drastic cut in number of different programs, each concert would be sold out to eager, enthusiastic audiences, grateful to hear perfectly prepared performances under such conditions of scarcity. There would also be approximately eight new-music concerts per season, each rehearsed eight or ten times, using an ensemble of as many as forty players. These programs, too, Mr. Fleischmann envisions as treats, composed as they would be of exhaustively rehearsed performances "conveying all the excitement, the stimulation, the surprises, the adventure that truly convincing performances of new music can create. And what a great job they'll do for our living composers, for the scintillating, disturbing, challenging, thrilling music of our time!"

For Mr. Fleischmann, the marvelous tasks waiting to be accomplished by his Community of Musicians go on and on. These include the provision of opera and ballet orchestras as well as "at least one and prob-

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ably two" chamber orchestras. The chamber orchestras would present at least twelve programs a year, each program repeated two or three times. And then there would be any number of string quartets, wind quintets, and brass ensembles, all performing regularly and administered by the Community's highly competent staff. Finally, two or three times a year all the players would get together "to play a Mahler 8 or a Berlioz Requiem!"

Mr. Fleischmann has education in mind as well, for all his groups would be available in the schools, with "everyone of them . . . able to provide its own special kind of performance/demonstration services." Musicians would participate in adult-education activities to prepare audiences for concerts. For those who like to teach, there would be the possibility of "enlightened, well-planned and well-organized teaching activities, all developed in collaborative efforts between the pool's musicians, their management team and the relevant education authorities." Mr. Fleischmann's last suggestion is that the Community include performers of ethnic music, folk music, and jazz, so that

> every single member of our Community of Musicians . . . [might] practice those forms of musical and ancillary activity which allow each and every one of them to express themselves [*sic*] fully.

Returning to the incendiary exhortation of Pierre Boulez with which he began, Mr. Fleischmann's ends with nothing less than a resounding call to arms:

> . . . I really need to ask you to commit a crime. I want you to become arsonists, yes, arsonists, to join me and lots of musicians, administrators and trustees in setting the symphony orchestra ablaze. If the music we care about so deeply is to survive, we must accept that the orchestra is burnt out, but from its ashes something infinitely richer, more varied, more satisfying can arise if we all work together to create it—ladies and gentlemen, the symphony orchestra is dead—long live the Community of Musicians!

We should, I assume, pass over the curious rhetorical formulation in which Mr. Fleischmann asks us to burn down something which (according to his account) is already, presumably through the previous incendiary actions of others, "burnt out," and in a state of "ashes." We should perhaps pass over, too, Mr. Fleischmann's easy, though rather late-occurring, assumption that "the music we care about" is indeed all truly valuable music, and that an institution rooted in the classics has a necessary commitment to every form of musical expression.

It is rather more difficult to ignore the arrant utopianism in which Mr. Fleischmann clothes what are rather unpleasant proposals. In many ways, this idea of a perfect music-performance community resembles radical nineteenth-century schemes of a liberated life in which there is a proper place for each person and in which each person finds that place through the rationally contrived arrangements of a beneficent social order. The adversary of these schemes of true community—whether they are based on sexual, spiritual, or economic premises—is individualism: the free and rationally determined choice, bound and shaped by our human need to live in society, to bear private responsibility for our thoughts and actions.

Whatever his motives, Mr. Fleischmann, like all utopian advocates, bases a conception so opposed to individual responsibility on the promise of a hitherto unachieved fulfillment of the individual. In the last century, utopianism was engendered by the erosion of socially shared values, values derived from religion, philosophy, and economics. This erosion provided an increased scope for individual action at the same time as it rendered the individual ever more alone in the cosmos. Some may find it a far cry from the last century's loss of faith in a transcendent being to our present musical situation, but there can be little doubt that the contemporary musical life of which Mr. Fleischmann speaks displays many of the same

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characteristics of the collapse of belief which, in mid-nineteenth-century England, gave rise to agnosticism, relativism, and the poignant attempt to recapture through ritual the essence of religion.

Almost within recent memory the sea of musical faith, to adapt Matthew Arnold's phrase in "Dover Beach" (c. 1855), was at the full; for most of those today deeply touched by great music, that artistic tide has now run out. Musical developments of the last half century—and perhaps more—bear an uncanny resemblance to the wider developments associated with nineteenth-century rationalism: I am here referring to the present loss of faith by the most musically creative in a usable past, to the widespread equivalence of high art and popular culture, and to the passionate attempts now being made by performers and audiences alike to find a musical salvation based upon academically sanctioned "authentic" performances of compositions from the beginning of the classic repertory.

This musical condition of creative exhaustion at the core is accompanied, curiously enough, by an appearance of the most floridly prosperous performing activity at the periphery. Like a fevered patient whose flush is mistaken for rosy health, the true state of music is almost impossible to diagnose—because of the sheer amount of activity taking place, because of the numerous celebrity careers being urged upon the audience, and because of the vested interest of those in musical power in justifying their perquisites and emoluments. And it is here that Mr. Fleischmann, acting as a powerful spokesman for the musical establishment, emerges not as a utopian at all, but rather as the hardest-headed of businessmen—or perhaps, one should say, of labor leaders.

For quite clearly Mr. Fleischmann is not suggesting the creation of a free community of musical saints, working in a condition of subsidized concentration on the creation of artistic truth. What he is urging upon us can only have the effect of saving a richly rewarding, though shaky, market for its present suppliers through the time-honored means of eliminating competition. Both the creators of the great nineteenth-century trusts and the captains of craft unions understood this process exceedingly well; they did not, however, describe what they were doing as necessary to the future of art and beauty.

In advancing his position, Mr. Fleischmann is only carrying further the explicit policies of our great orchestras over recent decades. It is known to all observers of the musical scene that these orchestras are territorially aggrandizing institutions whose primary concern, as fund-raising and image-creating organisms, is to preserve their positions as the first and only true orchestras in their communities. This is true in Boston, in New York, and certainly in Los Angeles; it is the reason why in the United States we have only one-orchestra towns. Everywhere in Europe, the great cities have more than one orchestra performing the symphonic repertory, in both live concerts and broadcasts. Here in the United States, major orchestral life is already deeply non-competitive, not just in each city, but even in the nation as a whole, a condition made more efficient by the close relations between the senior administrators of our major orchestras, and between these administrators and commercial managers operating out of New York. The extent of Mr. Fleischmann's concern for the preservation of this *status quo* is demonstrated by his proposals—advanced, it is true, only "hypothetically, or better still, metaphorically"—to merge into the great orchestras of their cities groups offering as little competition (for funds or audience) as New York's Orchestra of St. Luke's and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra.

Clearly, the centerpiece of Mr. Fleischmann's new order is not the concentration of musicians; it is the concentration of administration. At its highest level, the world of musical administration today is a tight little place; if anyone should doubt this fact of institutional life, he need only be aware that recently the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Cleveland Orchestra have dealt with their need for bold new policies and fresh administrative blood by the simple

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expedient of exchanging top administrators —Thomas Morris leaving Boston for Cleveland, and Kenneth Haas leaving Cleveland for Boston.

There can be little doubt that a few powerful administrators would indeed stand to benefit from the enactment of Mr. Fleischmann's proposal. There would be higher budgets to allocate, more money for the surviving organizations to raise, more employees, bigger and more powerful boards to support administrative policies, and an even greater tilting of the balance of power from artistic concerns to those of business management.

What would be the fate of the musicians if Mr. Fleischmann were to have his way? Even more than is true now, there would be only one employer in town. Competition with that one employer would be even more difficult to carry off successfully than is the case today; labor negotiations would find musicians pitted against much more powerful management negotiating teams than now; most important, the power of the individual, self-concerned musician would be vastly reduced. All in all, insofar as musicians are concerned, the situation which Mr. Fleischmann envisions could only have the effect of replacing one-orchestra towns with company towns.

What about the music-loving audience under this new dispensation? Doubtless the administrative skills which Mr. Fleischmann and his colleagues possess would provide better-run—and perhaps even better-prepared —concerts, though their number would be fewer and the choice available to listeners inevitably smaller. Mr. Fleischmann is, after all, suggesting the scheduling of no new activities, only the better presentation and organization of what is now being done. But even this better presentation would of necessity be centrally determined, with musical decision-making divided between an absentee music director with no interest in new music, a new-music director with a limited or even non-existent public, and a chamber-orchestra conductor with no access to the major symphonic repertory. Only strong administrative control, in the hands of one individual, would have any hope of making sense out such a chaotic situation.

Above all, there is no reason whatsoever to believe that Mr. Fleischmann's proposal would bring any *musical* benefits at all. It is idle to suppose that increased rehearsal time under the direction of what Mr. Fleischmann himself states are inadequate conductors would bring any benefits; it is unreasonable to assume that cutting down the number of available concerts would produce more, rather than less, musical knowledge; it is illusory to think that the problems of new music can be helped by providing a golden ghetto for contemporary composition. The small size of the ensemble Mr. Fleischmann desires for new-music performance—no more than forty players—would, under the monopoly conditions inherent in his scheme, practically guarantee that composers would give up the attempt to write truly symphonic music. The same celebrities would be playing much the same repertory in the same way. And why should ethnic music or folk music and jazz benefit from performance under the aegis of an institution devoted primarily to classical music? As to the ultimate artistic value of Mr. Fleischmann's suggestion that there should be one or two jamborees each season in which all the musicians, of whatever interests and goals, get together to give extra-loud performances of much-played sonic spectaculars of the literature—I leave it to the reader to judge for himself.

I cannot end without returning directly to the title of this article: Is the symphony orchestra dead? The answer to this question must be no. The symphony orchestra is very much alive, if by "alive" one refers to the interpretation of some of the greatest works of art for audiences composed of sophisticated listeners and new cadres coming to beautiful music more or less for the first time. By performing this task, the orchestra is accomplishing the vital function of preserving and extending civilization. Because it performs this task it is worthy of support

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by all those responsible for the future of our society.

The fact that the symphony orchestra is alive and is performing a vital cultural function does not mean that its present condition is either healthy or happy. The problems with orchestral life, and with musical life as a whole, are great. As I have tried to make clear, they stem from internal difficulties in the musical creativity of our time, and from the way the resultant artistic vacuum has been filled by extraneous economic and social forces. The scale of universal public success on which symphony orchestras are expected to operate is too large; the quasi-commercial success they must achieve in order to be perceived as legitimate is unrealistic. To restrict the scale of orchestral life through a process of further concentration provides no solution. It is time for musicians to take their futures in their own hands, by demanding that conductors be chosen for their musical skills rather than for their European celebrity status. They must also take seriously the problem of contemporary composition; this can only be done by performers demanding new music that they, as musicians, can love. There is nothing wrong with musical life that serious conductors in charge of great orchestras, playing new compositions of permanent value, cannot cure. In any case, there is little likelihood that our salvation will come from administrators whose skills lie entirely in the merchandising of that which has already become famous somewhere else.

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Talking heads: the novels of Saul Bellow

by Bruce Bawer

We can't say he didn't warn us. On the very first page of his first novel, *Dangling Man,* Saul Bellow's narrator-protagonist complains that in present-day America

> the code of the athlete, of the tough boy . . . is stronger than ever. Do you have feelings? There are correct and incorrect ways of indicating them. Do you have an inner life? It is nobody's business but your own. Do you have emotions? Strangle them . . . . If you have difficulties, grapple with them silently, goes one of their commandments. To hell with that! I intend to talk about mine, and if I had as many mouths as Siva has arms and kept them going all the time, I still could not do myself justice.

Bellow has been talking ever since. In the past forty-three years he has published ten novels, and whatever else one might find to say about them, they have (with only a single exception) been remarkably talky. And the savvy reader always knew who it was, really, doing the talking: the protagonist might have happened to go by the name of Artur Sammler or Moses Herzog or Charlie Citrine or Augie March, but when he began carrying on about sorrow and love and the emptiness of the heart and the meaning of existence in modern America, it was patently Bellow, and nobody else, who was speaking. This is not to deny that many of the things Bellow has had to say have been worth listening to; on the contrary, he has almost invariably had highly intelligent observations to make about the life he leads and the world he knows. It is simply to indicate that one cannot imagine Bellow, in the heat of composition, coming up with a bit of social commentary or a tidbit of philosophical wisdom and saying to himself, "No, this observation isn't right for *this* novel's protagonist. Maybe the next one." (Or, "This discursive passage just doesn't go here; it slows down the action; it blurs the focus.") The truth is that, for all their differences, when it comes to range of reference and cast of thought, most of Bellow's protagonists are interchangeable; and all too often, alas, it seems as if range of reference and cast of thought are all that some of Bellow's protagonists amount to.

It is hardly surprising that Bellow has given his tenth novel the title *More Die of Heartbreak.*[1] For throughout his career, both death and heartbreak have figured significantly in Bellow's fiction. They are, one might even say with little exaggeration, Bellow's stock-in-trade. Almost all of his novels contain a prominent *memento mori* motif. Over the course of *Dangling Man,* the protagonist's landlady grows ill and dies; in *The Victim,* Asa Leventhal's nephew Mickey takes ill at the beginning of the novel and passes away near the end; at the close of *Seize*

1 *More Die of Heartbreak,* by Saul Bellow; Morrow, 335 pages, $17.95.

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the Day, Tommy Wilhelm, whose father continually speaks of his own imminent death, weeps at the funeral of a stranger; near the beginning of *Henderson the Rain King,* Eugene Henderson finds the dead body of a neighbor, and the realization that he too will die spurs him to escape the world he knows and go to Africa; at the conclusion of *Humboldt's Gift,* Charlie Citrine, who has been haunted by the memory of his late friend Von Humboldt Fleisher, witnesses Humboldt's reburial; and in *The Dean's December,* Albert Corde travels with his wife to Rumania to see her critically ill mother, who eventually passes away.

In *More Die of Heartbreak* it is a businessman-thug named Vilitzer—an uncle of the narrator, Kenneth Trachtenberg—who has an appointment with the Grim Reaper. Vilitzer's age and feebleness are discussed throughout the novel; his death is announced in the book's last brief section. "I don't see why you're broken up over that old crook," says Kenneth when he sees his Uncle Benn weeping. Benn's response: "[H]e was still a man, a person. Now he's just a packet of ashes, inside a black box." This is a constant theme in Bellow's work: that all human beings are our brothers and when they die they deserve our grief, for no other reason than that they were human. The reason that Bellow so often sets his novels against a backdrop of death is probably most succinctly summed up in the injunction that Tommy Wilhelm recalls in *Seize the Day*: ". . . love that well which thou must leave ere long."

None of the above-mentioned individuals, of course, dies of heartbreak. But in Bellow's novels, many a character's heart, if it is not broken, is at least tormented in one way or another. At various points in the novels, hearts are heavy, hurt, quaking, aching, sore, soft, stirred, sinking, full, tender, troubled, torn, rent, pent, overflowing, passionate, suffocated, and even "shat on"; they swell and flutter and "feel sick" and pound "with dangerous thick beats." The protagonist of *Dangling Man* describes "the least penetrable part of me" as "the seldom-disturbed thickets around the heart." In *Humboldt's Gift,* Charlie Citrine (who suffers "uneasiness or heaviness of heart") tells his daughter that he loved his parents "[d]eep in the heart," discusses with Humboldt "the riches of the human heart," and is told by his friend Ulick that if living in Chicago "hasn't killed your fucking heart, you must be a man of iron." In *Herzog,* Moses Herzog dwells on "the American experience of the heart and the deepening of character in the modern age," wires the man who cuckolded him that "Dirt Enters At The Heart," and worries that if his daughter is not "educated according to the Herzog standards of 'heart' . . . she will fail to become a human being." And Herzog quotes Rousseau: *"je sens mon coeur et je connais les hommes."* When he wants to give a passage that special extra touch of emotional profundity, Bellow will often work in the word *heart.* Thus the heart figures in the conclusion of more than one of his novels. At the end of *Mr. Sammler's Planet,* Artur Sammler prays over the body of his dead nephew, observing that the young man "did meet the terms of his contract" with life, "[t]he terms which, in his inmost heart, each man knows." And at the close of *Seize the Day,* when Tommy Wilhelm attends the stranger's funeral, he "crie[s] with all his heart," sinking "deeper than sorrow, through torn sobs and cries toward the consummation of his heart's ultimate need."

Heart is not the only abstraction that recurs in this fashion in Bellow's novels. The words *soul* and *spirit* are perhaps equally prevalent. And the word *human,* often in combination with the word *being.* This is appropriate, because Bellow means for us to recognize his protagonists as human beings of heart and soul and spirit—sensitive intellectuals, almost to a man (and they *are* all men, and urbanites, and all but two of them are Jewish), trapped in an age and a society that, we are meant to understand, make it supremely difficult for one to be a human being of heart and soul and spirit. Because they are this sort of human being, Bellow's heroes suffer tremendously—and *suffer* is

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another favorite word of his. A friend of Herzog's, observing his grief over the collapse of his marriage, speaks of suffering in a strange, complimentary manner with which Bellow would seem to be sympathetic: "Well, when you suffer, you really suffer. You're a real, genuine old Jewish type that digs the emotions. I'll give you that." Later in the same novel, Herzog wonders whether he's "paid his debt to suffering," and speaks of "creating suffering" and "suffering in joy."

These words—and one or two others, such as *sorrow*—adorn Bellow's pages like merit badges or combat medals intended to testify to the depth of his protagonists' feelings, the degree to which they have been victimized by life. Gloom, world-weariness, and suffering: in the world of Bellow's novels these things are the order of the day. Indeed, Bellow often seems to believe that to be world-weary is to be sophisticated, to be gloomy is to be serious, to suffer is to be virtuous. (In *Humboldt's Gift,* Citrine speaks of "the graver, more important human feelings"—as if love and joy were less important.) The reader is supposed to be moved by this suffering, to feel for and identify with the hero-as-victim; for though the protagonist is more often than not an intellectual, living in either Chicago or New York, he is also clearly intended to be an Everyman figure, whose plight is recognizable to people who couldn't even *spell* Wittgenstein.

But Bellow's novels are not as effective, on this score, as he doubtless would like them to be. For one thing, since it is usually difficult not to identify Bellow's heroes with the author himself, all the talk of the greatness of their souls, hearts, humanity, and suffering—especially when other characters are dwelt upon so sporadically—quickly begins to look like mere self-absorption, self-glorification. For another thing, feelings in Bellow's novels are more often named than believably communicated, more often discussed than truly felt. As a rule, his fiction is as emotionally inert as it is intellectually intense. When such words as *heartbreak* and *sorrow* and *suffering* appear—especially (as they sometimes do) in pleonastic profusion—it is almost as if they are there by way of acknowledging the author's unwillingness to evoke the corresponding emotions. To read Bellow, in short, is typically not to be made to feel but to be made (or at least asked) to think about certain categories of feeling.

And not just of feeling: all of Bellow's novels are concerned, in a major way, with moral, philosophical, social, and political questions. A randomly chosen twenty-page passage from any of the novels will almost certainly touch upon several of the following questions: What responsibilities does a man have to himself? To his family? To his society? To the human race? What is the value of life? Of democracy? Of civilization? Of culture? Of money? Of sex? What does it mean to be an American? What are the proper limits of ambition? These are obviously important questions, and Bellow's thinking upon them is almost invariably of a high order. Indeed, the typical page of Bellow contains more evidence of a superior and serious mind at work than do the entire texts of most novels. This is no less true of *More Die of Heartbreak* than of any of its predecessors; Bellow's new book, in which the uncle of a young university professor marries an unsuitable woman and finds his entire way of life and system of values threatened, attests to Bellow's continuing fascination with such questions. Yet with this novel, as with all but one of Bellow's earlier novels, one's ability to become engaged by the characters' reflections on life and man and America—or, for that matter, to respond to their feelings, if not with empathy, then at least with understanding and pity—is frequently compromised by a certain lack of restraint on Bellow's part. Whether he is interrupting his narrative to expound upon his characters' private sorrows or to relate their reflections on American civilization and culture—or whether, as often happens, he is doing both simultaneously—he will generally either go on too long, repeat himself unnecessarily, or engage in hyperbolic rhetoric.

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To read any of his novels (with, again, a single exception) is to be frustrated by his insistence upon suspending the narrative, at every turn, for yet another grand pronouncement—a pronouncement which may or may not have anything to do with the grand pronouncement on the previous page, but which, if one has read enough Bellow, will probably remind one of a dozen or so other pronouncements of comparable grandeur. Perhaps the most frustrating thing about reading Bellow is that these self-exploratory and discursive passages usually don't lead anywhere, don't add up to anything, don't connect with one another in any systematic way, and don't seem to have much impact (or, when they do, don't have a very *plausible* impact) upon the protagonist's state of mind or the direction of his life. Sometimes, for that matter, one bit of Bellovian wisdom contradicts another. It is obvious that Bellow recognizes all this, and that he thinks it is just fine. Yet it would be understandable for a reader to decide, after reading two or three of Bellow's books of fiction, that they are less novels, in any conventional (or even unconventional) sense, than intellectual grab-bags. Several times in Bellow's books, characters venture the fanciful opinion that human beings are mere shadows; alas, in most of his novels, they assuredly are. The publication of *More Die of Heartbreak*—which I will discuss presently—would seem to provide a splendid opportunity to examine this phenomenon at some length.

In Bellow's short first novel, *Dangling Man* (1944), for example, the protagonist—who gives his name only as Joseph—argues that in the twentieth century, and particularly in America, "we have been taught there is no limit to what a man can be." If, during the God-fearing Middle Ages, "a man was what he was born to be," in the modern world "the stage has been reset and human beings only walk upon it," and instead of God "we have . . . history to answer to." So far, so good. But as Joseph goes on his rhetoric grows excessive, and—although it is clear that Bellow expects the reader to identify with him—the state of mind he describes eventually becomes unrecognizable to anyone not suffering from clinical depression:

> We were important enough then [six hundred years ago] for our souls to be fought over. Now each of us is responsible for his own salvation, which is his greatness. And that, that greatness, is the rock our hearts are abraded on . . . we hate immoderately and punish ourselves and one another immoderately. The fear of lagging pursues and maddens us. The fear lies in us like a cloud. It makes an inner climate of darkness . . . .

Joseph's entire situation in *Dangling Man* is an instance of Bellovian excess. As the book opens, seven months have passed since Joseph quit his travel-bureau job "to answer the Army's call for induction"; but, because of bureaucratic red tape, the call hasn't come. So Joseph, supported by his wife, has been at liberty; his life is one of "narcotic dullness," but he won't get another job because "I am unwilling to admit that I do not know how to use my freedom." To be sure, he's tried his hand at some essays on the philosophers of the Enlightenment, but has thrown them aside to keep the journal that comprises the text of the novel. In the journal he writes about himself sometimes in the first person, sometimes in the third, and debates with himself—in the form of a "Spirit of Alternatives" that he addresses as *Tu As Raison Aussi*—the comparative values of regular employment and total freedom. He notes that "Joseph suffers from a feeling of strangeness, of not quite belonging to the world, of lying under a cloud and looking up at it." In short, he lives outside the respectable workaday world, and contrasts himself with his friend Myron, an insider who "has worked hard to reach his present position" and who, unlike Joseph, has learned to appreciate convenience and make compromises. Yet eventually Joseph determines that he, and modern Americans in general, find it difficult to govern themselves and are therefore afflicted with an "inability

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to be free" that causes them "weariness of life." When his notice finally comes, bringing his period of freedom to an end, Joseph is grateful to be "relieved of self-determination." The book ends with heavy-handed irony:

> Hurray for regular hours!
> And for the supervision of the spirit!
> Long live regimentation!

Bellow patently wants to suggest that real freedom is rare, and that American life is such that even when we are given freedom we feel oppressed by it, and prefer the regimentation of regular employment, however spiritually unrewarding it may be. But the book does not convey this theme convincingly. Joseph's anguish is excessive to the point of unbelievability; he speaks of his liberty as if it were the most horrible torture known to man. His self-absorption, moreover ("Shall my life," he wonders, "by one-thousandth of an inch fall short of its ultimate possibility?"), makes him less than lovable. Besides, he seems to be too much of an intellectual to have such trouble finding something to do with his time. This is, after all, a man who, in the name-dropping manner of almost all Bellow protagonists, speaks of his friend Abt as "Lenin, Mozart, and Locke all rolled into one," and whose friend Alf reminds him of Rameau's nephew, "described by Diderot as '. . . un (personnage) composé de hauteur et de bassesse, de bon sens et de deraison.'" Such a man certainly wouldn't find a gift of time to read and think and write such a cosmic tragedy. Even if he did, it would be up to the author to distance himself from the character, to try to give some sense of why such a fortunate individual might be so pathologically self-involved, so morbidly full of self-pity. But that is not Bellow's view of Joseph, and not his intention; he identifies with Joseph, and wants his readers to do so as well. The crux of the problem with the novel is that such identification is impossible; Joseph is not a man so much as he is an embodiment of Bellow's ideas about man—many of which, at the time he wrote *Dangling Man,* were strongly influenced by Existentialist philosophy. What Bellow does in his first novel, in short, is to try to pass off a Sartrean shadow puppet as Everyman—with the result that, although the book makes plain the impressiveness of Bellow's intellectual attainments, it is not much of a novel.

"How should a good man live; what ought he to do?" This is a question that Joseph asks himself in his journals, and it is one that Bellow has posed anew, in one way or another, in each of his novels since *Dangling Man. The Victim* (1947), a short, temperate novel in the third person, concerns a New York editor named Asa Leventhal, who has been an "insider" for only a few months. Before acquiring his job, he lived, like Joseph, on the fringes of the respectable world; when an acquaintance named Kirby Allbee arranged a job interview for him, Leventhal, with his outsider's lack of pragmatic restraint, insulted the interviewer and may unwittingly have lost Allbee his position. Now safe and comfortable, Leventhal begins to be pestered by an unemployed and emotionally unstable Allbee for some form of restitution. This turn of events provokes in Leventhal a number of unsettling thoughts. Profound generalizations fill his mind—about the cruelty of American society (he has "the feeling that he really did not know what went on about him, what strange things, savage things"), about the limitlessness of Americans' ambitions ("[e]verybody wanted to be what he was to the limit. When you looked around, that was what you saw most distinctly. In great achievements as well as in crimes and vices"), and about many other things.

As a novel, *The Victim* is an unarguable advance over *Dangling Man*: the protagonist is more believable, the supporting characters more rounded; though the oppressively dark and confined atmosphere seems at times too self-consciously (and almost monotonously) Kafkaesque, it is nonetheless very artfully evoked. What's more, Bellow is splendid at conveying a frightening

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sense of the financial precariousness of many middle-aged people's lives: one can *feel* (a rare experience in Bellow) Leventhal's insecurity over his job, his fear of falling between the cracks of society and becoming an outsider again. Yet, as with *Dangling Man,* the overt excursions into metaphysics and social analysis are plentiful to the point of distraction and annoyance; and for all the bad things that happen to him, the protagonist's gloom frequently seems excessive. All in all, *The Victim* is a promising small novel, stylish and well formed, which suffers considerably from its author's enchantment with doom and gloom, and his unfortunate tendency to *tell* rather than to *show.*

Both of Bellow's first two novels received considerable praise upon publication. But it was *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953) that established him as a major novelist of his generation, and, in particular, as a philosopher of sorts about the meaning of American life. For *Augie March* is a picaresque novel in the American naturalistic tradition of *U.S.A.* and Theodore Dreiser, and its hero is a Jewish cousin to Studs Lonigan as well as a descendant of Huckleberry Finn. Brought up in a poor Chicago family by his mother and by a boarder named "Grandma" who "wise[d] us up" with "animadversion[s] on the trustful, loving, and simple surrounded by the cunning-hearted and tough," Augie sets out on an odyssey that involves him in all sorts of enterprises of varying degrees of legality, including an outfit run by a shady but learned real-estate operator named William Einhorn, who quotes from *Hamlet* and refers in casual conversation to Alcibiades and Socrates. Augie is an energetic young man but doesn't know what he wants or where he is going. Yet he has an "ambition of something special and outstanding." Einhorn warns him, "You've got *opposition* in you"—i.e., he's a born outsider, a natural candidate, unless he watches himself, for "the clinks and clinics and soup lines."

The difference between Augie and the protagonists of Dreiser, Farrell, and company, needless to say, is that Augie is the naturalist hero as intellectual. Augie is introduced to books when he becomes involved in a book-stealing scam: before long, he is reading—and, of course, reeling off the names of—all sorts of great writers: "Two volumes of Nietzsche's *Will to Power* I had a hell of a time swiping, for they were in a closed case at the Economy Book Store; I also got him Hegel's *Philosophy of Right,* as well as the last volumes of *Capital* from the Communist bookshop on Division Street, Herzen's *Autobiography,* and some De Tocqueville." Naturally, Augie devours all this stuff in record time, and before you know it he sounds like—well, like Saul Bellow. But he's not the only one. Wherever he goes in the seamy urban underworld, Augie somehow manages to find himself in the company of extraordinarily well read, articulate people with strong ideas about the nature of modern American civilization. Indeed, they all sound as if they're on their way to the same symposium. And they're all eager as hell to share their ideas with Augie: he barely says hello to these people before they start pontificating. A stammering millionaire, for instance, tells Augie that the rise of American democracy and American wealth represents "the greatest crisis in history," for once "the decrepit old civilizations" with their grinding poverty were swept away,

> we'd find out if there was going to be this earthly paradise or not . . . . M-machinery'll make an ocean of commodities. Dictators can't stop it. Man will accept death. Live without God. That's a b-brave project. End of an illusion. But with what values instead?

Bellow is so preoccupied here with what the millionaire is saying that he doesn't seem to consider that a reader might find it difficult to imagine a millionaire saying such things. So frequently does a reader have this sort of difficulty that it comes to seem as if Bellow incorporates such arguments and apothegms into the novel as they occur to him, and places them in the mouth of whichever character happens to be onstage at the time.

Augie March does have considerable vir-

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tues. Perhaps more successfully than any other Bellow novel, it evokes the rush, the complexity, the energy of American urban life. And the picaresque form is well suited to Bellow's own dialectical tendencies: simply by putting many of his discursive passages in the mouths of successive characters (each of them drawn with exuberance and a rare attentiveness to physical detail), Bellow gives *Augie March* a sense of movement that many of his books lack. Yet, like many of Bellow's other novels, *Augie,* taken as a whole, amounts to a good deal less than the sum of its parts—a failing more noticeable in this instance than in any other, if only because *Augie* (the longest of Bellow's novels) contains so many parts. For all the wonderful concrete details that this book contains (and it contains many), Bellow seems, in its pages, to labor under the impression that, for a novel to be truly impressive—truly *serious*—every concrete detail must lead to some abstraction, the loftier the better. Time and again, potentially powerful dramatic climaxes are blunted when Bellow makes a gratuitous shift into the didactic mode, and proceeds to spell out "truths" (e.g., "The power of an individual to act through his intellect on the reason of mankind is smaller now than ever") that would be more effectively conveyed through dramatic means. In the end, furthermore, despite all his reading and listening and observations and insights, Augie seems to have come to few firm conclusions, to have found no direction; as Norman Podhoretz wrote in his 1959 essay on the book, Augie "goes through everything, yet undergoes nothing." Indeed, for all the ideas about humanity that he kicks around, there is not much human substance to him; to exaggerate only slightly, he is six hundred generalizations in search of a character. And the book that takes its name from him is less the *Bildungsroman* that it seems intended to be than it is a potpourri of *pensées.*

Bellow followed his longest novel with his shortest. *Seize the Day* (1956) is Bellow's most admirable work of fiction—concise, cogent, and finely controlled. Tommy Wilhelm is in his middle forties and is residing at the Hotel Gloriana on New York's Upper West Side, which is mostly occupied by elderly people, his physician father among them. Like Augie March, Tommy Wilhelm has energy—and it's done him nothing but harm. For years he tried to be a movie actor in Hollywood, but then "his ambition or delusion had ended," and he became a salesman, and now—that pursuit having failed as well, along with his marriage—another resident of the hotel, a shady character named Dr. Tamkin, has talked him into speculating in the commodities market. "Seize the day," Tamkin advises.

The book is unique among Bellow's works. The setting is meticulously described, and several of the characters are memorably developed. Most remarkable of all, though, is Bellow's restraint: with a few exceptions (e.g., the list of books by "Korzybski, Aristotle, Freud, W. H. Sheldon" in Dr. Tamkin's apartment), neither the narrator nor any of the characters feels obliged to drop the names of high-toned books and authors or to generalize about such matters as suffering, death, freedom, and the meaning of America—which are, nonetheless, among the themes of *Seize the Day*; and the book is all the more effective, of course, because of this avoidance of explicit theme-mongering. The novel's conclusion is especially powerful: in quick succession Wilhelm discovers that Dr. Tamkin has swindled him, is rejected by his father ("Go away from me now. It's torture for me to look at you, you slob!"), and has a painful telephone conversation with his estranged wife; he then finds himself in "the great, great crowd" on Broadway,

> the inexhaustible current of millions of every race and kind pouring out, pressing round, of every age, of every genius, possessors of every human secret, antique and future, in every face the refinement of one particular motive or essence—*I labor, I spend, I strive, I design, I love, I cling, I uphold, I give way, I envy, I long, I scorn, I die, I hide, I want.*

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A moment later he is in a funeral chapel, on a slow line filing past a coffin; the dead man's meditative look strikes him with "horror," then "heartsickness," and then finally "sorrow," but he cannot leave the corpse, and is soon crying over it, his sadness at the death of "another human creature" mixed with his continuing anguish over his own problems. It is an affecting ending, as much a reminder of the ubiquity of death (and of the fact that life continues, in all its equivocality, pettiness, and pathos, in spite of death) as it is an affirmation of human connectedness. One of the special things about *Seize the Day,* in fact, is that it seems more universal—less bound to its particular time and place, less concerned with facile social criticism, more sharply focused upon the eternal verities—than Bellow's other novels. Of all Bellow's endings, moreover (which are, as a rule, notorious for their inconclusiveness), the ending of *Seize the Day* is the one that feels most like a coherent, satisfactory, and earned resolution.

At the close of *Seize the Day,* the description of the crowd on Broadway seems life-affirming; at the beginning of Bellow's next novel, *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), a more self-referential catalogue has the opposite effect. The narrator is Eugene Henderson, a fatuous millionaire who wants to explain why he took his big trip to Africa, though "there is no quick explanation."

> When I think of my condition at the age of fifty-five when I bought the ticket, all is grief. The facts begin to crowd me and soon I get a pressure in the chest. A disorderly rush begins —my parents, my wives, my girls, my children, my farm, my animals, my habits, my money, my music lessons, my drunkenness, my prejudices, my brutality, my teeth, my face, my soul! I have to cry, "No, no, get back, curse you, let me alone!" But how can they let me alone? They belong to me. They are mine. And they pile into me from all sides. It turns into chaos.

He proceeds to give a quick resumé of his life: it consists largely of two marriages, five children, and "a ceaseless voice in my heart that said, *I want, I want, I want.*" Clearly this is a man who needs a Bellovian lesson in limits. In any event, somehow or another—he can't quite define how or why—this "disturbance in [his] heart" led Henderson to Africa.

Henderson the Rain King is, in many ways, the most uncharacteristic of Bellow's books: the protagonist is a Gentile, the setting rural. Yet there are parallels to other Bellow novels, in particular *The Adventures of Augie March.* For, like *Augie March, Henderson* is the exuberant yet strangely solemn story of an adventurer, a man in search of self-definition who at novel's end claims to have learned a thing or two about life but who has not really changed at all. Among the differences between them, of course, is that Augie is poor, young, and Jewish, and Henderson is rich, middle-aged, and WASPy. He has reason to identify strongly with America and its history: his great-grandfather was a secretary of state, his father a friend of William James and Henry Adams. But for him his native land does not seem, at the novel's beginning, to hold any promise; nor does it offer any reply to the obscure, persistent cry of his heart.

But Africa doesn't seem to answer his cry either. He seeks transcendence; but his encounters with the natives—he cockily tries to rid one tribe's water supply of frogs, for example, and his explosives end up destroying the water supply itself—teach him that he is no god. And herein lies a big problem with the book: the reader knows from the beginning that Henderson is no god, and cannot be overly sympathetic with him when he learns otherwise. There are some charming and funny incidents in the novel, and it is less clogged with distracting discursive passages than most of Bellow's books. But in the final analysis it is peculiar and unsatisfying; the African setting and characters are largely unconvincing, the ending inconclusive, and Henderson himself—by far the least intellectual of Bellow's protagonists ("I haven't ever been calm enough to read")—too unattractive and uninteresting to sustain

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one's attention for the length of the novel (which is not Bellow's longest, but reads like it). How, after all, can one care much about a conceited, obnoxious millionaire whose heart keeps crying *I want, I want, I want*? One's initial impulse is to tell him to grow up; and this impulse doesn't change much over the course of the book.

In *Herzog* (1964), Bellow returned to familiar territory. Moses Herzog is a middle-aged Jewish intellectual historian from Chicago, the author of a book called *Romanticism and Christianity* whose wife, Madeleine, has divorced him and become the lover of his best friend, Valentine Gersbach. Though Herzog—who has left Chicago for New York, where he teaches a night course in "The Roots of Romanticism"—has as his consolation the sexual companionship of an attractive student named Ramona, his "heart has been shat on" and his sanity shaken. He insists that he's "not going to be a victim," but that's what he acts like: when he is not busy thinking about his ex-wife, his daughter, his Yiddish-speaking Russian parents, and everybody from de Maistre to Tocqueville, he is composing cranky letters to public figures and perpetrating a manic mélange of *mots* on the subjects of life, death, selfhood ("'personal' life is a humiliation, and to be an individual contemptible"), the "destiny of Man," the nature of freedom in the modern world ("people can be free now but the freedom doesn't have any content. It's like a howling emptiness"), and of course America:

> *The people who come to evening classes are only ostensibly after culture. Their great need, their hunger, is for good sense, clarity, truth—even an atom of it. People are dying—it is no metaphor—for lack of something real to carry home when day is done* . . . what a responsibility we bear, in this fat country of ours! Think what America could mean to the world. Then see what it is. What a breed it might have produced. But look at us—at you, at me. Read the paper, if you can bear to.

But most of Herzog's dark socio-political musings, as well as his conviction that "the human spirit has poured itself" in recent years into a "program of destruction," seem intimately connected to his melancholy over losing Madeleine—and, perhaps, his guilt over having left behind the Montreal ghetto, where he'd had "[a]ll he ever wanted," and over having married a *shiksa*. This circumstance would seem to call the validity of his remarks, as social criticism, into question; but Bellow obviously doesn't think so. To him they are plainly not just the *disjecta membra* of a tortured soul, but valid observations worthy of our thoughtful consideration. Nor does Bellow ever appear to consider it ridiculous that Herzog intellectualizes absolutely *everything* (e.g., "It's possible that a man like Hoberly [a former lover of Ramona's] by falling apart intends to bear witness to the failure of individual existence").

For all the breadth of his social commentary, though, Herzog dwells mostly upon himself:

> Oh, what a thing I am—what a *thing!* . . . I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed . . . . What good, what lasting good is there in me? Is there nothing else between birth and death but what I can get out of this perversity—only a favorable balance of disorderly emotions? No freedom? Only impulses? And what about all the good I have in my heart—doesn't it mean anything? Is it simply a joke? A false joke that makes a man feel the illusion of worth?

The self-absorption of some of these passages in *Herzog* is incredible; equally incredible is the degree to which Herzog wallows in dejection. Susan Sontag once called for an "erotics of art"; Bellow, in *Herzog*, perfects what might be called an erotics of melancholy:

> He was in pain. He should be. Quite right. If only because he had required so many people to lie to him, many, many, beginning, naturally, with his mother. Mothers lie to their children from demand. But perhaps his mother had been struck, too, by the amount of melancholy, her own melancholy, she saw in Moses.

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> The family look, the eyes, those eye-lights. And though he recalled his mother's sad face with love, he couldn't say, in his soul, that he wanted to see such sadness perpetuated. Yes, it reflected the deep experience of a race, its attitude toward happiness and toward mortality. This somber human case, this dark husk, these indurated lines of submission to the fate of being human, this splendid face showed the responses of his mother's finest nerves to the greatness of life, rich in sorrow, in death . . . .

And so forth. At times Bellow seems determined to prove that he can carry on endlessly, hysterically, *sorrowfully,* about any aspect of himself (or Herzog's self). This is true not only of Herzog's thoughts but of his conversations, some of which are so pretentious that one can hardly appreciate whatever they may contain in the way of real self-understanding. Does anyone, for instance, actually talk like this to his beloved?

> ". . . You want to put me on a higher level and bring out the Orphic element in me. But I've tried to be a pretty mediocre person, if the truth be told . . . . On the side, I was just flirting a little with the transcendent."

And would a man who is sitting in a car, preparing to kill his wife's lover, actually think about the fact that "demographers estimate that at least half of all the human beings ever born are alive now, in this century. What a moment for the human soul!" If *Herzog* is a particularly frustrating book to read, it is because the novel testifies to the existence of so many feelings that are simply not evoked in its pages.

Herzog—Bellow's sixth novel—seems in retrospect to have been a sort of watershed. For all their thematic sameness, Bellow's first five novels vary relatively widely in size, form, and so forth: *Dangling Man* takes the form of a journal; *Seize the Day* is brief, taut, and Flaubertian, *Augie March* capacious, diffuse, and naturalistic; *Henderson the Rain King* is about a WASP in Africa. Bellow's second five novels, beginning with *Herzog,* constitute a more uniform group; it is as if, in *Herzog,* Bellow finally found a basic form and manner that he was willing to settle upon. These later novels are all rather long, and each focuses upon a relatively short period—a few days or weeks—in the life of a New York or Chicago intellectual with (usually) a professional interest in social history or the history of ideas. The novels are desultory, slow to establish a plot and slow to develop it; the narrators continually wander away from the story line, piling digression upon digression, shuttling from one time frame to another, creating a mixed salad of tangentially relevant anecdotes, cries of the heart, high-toned reading lists, and social and philosophical reflections. The principal conflicts are personal ones involving love, death, and crime, but they are all intended to convey larger truths about the nature of humanity and, of course, about the dreadful state of American society and culture in our time.

Mr. Sammler's Planet (1969) presents us with Artur Sammler, a man in his seventies who lives alone on New York's Upper West Side; the son of a once well-to-do European family, he is now forced to do "things that cooks and maids had once done" and takes this sorry state of affairs as a sign of "[h]istorical ruin." He spends a good deal of time at the Forty-second Street Library, and on the bus he takes home he has begun noticing a black pickpocket at work. The criminal fascinates him; he informs the police, but they can't do anything. So fascinated is Sammler, in fact, that he takes to riding the bus more than ever—until one day the pickpocket notices his interest, follows Sammler home, and exposes himself to him.

Like Herzog, Sammler occupies much of his time by coming up with broad generalizations about the human condition in our era:

> [Broadway] was aware of being a scene of perversity, it knew its own despair. And fear. The terror of it. Here you might see the soul of America at grips with historical problems, struggling with certain impossibilities, expe-

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> riencing violently states inherently static. Being realized but trying itself to realize, to act. Attempting to make interest. This attempt to make interest was, for Mr. Sammler, one reason for the pursuit of madness. Madness is the attempted liberty of people who feel themselves overwhelmed by giant forces of organized control. Seeking the magic of extremes. Madness is a base form of the religious life.

And he thinks a lot about the decline of civilization, especially in terms of race. To Bellow, Sammler and the pickpocket embody a number of contrasts: civilized *vs.* primitive man; mind *vs.* body; conventional *vs.* modern (circa 1970) sensibilities; good *vs.* evil; restrained dignity *vs.* "oceanic, boundless, primitive, neckfree nobility"; humankind's "old patience," now extinct, *vs.* "the peculiar aim of sexual niggerhood [sic] for everyone"; and, finally, Idea *vs.* Will—for, as Sammler recalls, Schopenhauer declared that "[t]he organs of sex are the seat of the Will" and that "only Ideas are not overpowered by the Will."

There is much to admire in *Sammler*: the old man is one of Bellow's most fully realized protagonists, and is compelling as well as endearing; both his fascination with the pickpocket and the contrasts between the two men are nicely developed. Moreover, the New York setting is vividly suggested. Yet the book has its troubling aspects, one of them being that there is something rather offensive about establishing an exhibitionist and a pickpocket as a symbol of the black race—or, to put it another way, about using the black race as an emblem of criminality. Furthermore, many of Sammler's observations about modern life would seem to be equally applicable to life in any period of human history; for instance, one would think, from the way this book laments the sexual hedonism of modern America, that sex was a late twentieth-century discovery. This would be a much stronger novel if only someone had persuaded Bellow to excise most of the discursive passages and allow the story to speak for itself.

Humboldt's Gift (1975) is, at least in part, the most plainly autobiographical of Bellow's novels. The protagonist, Charlie Citrine, is a Chicago writer, the author of a highly successful Broadway play and the winner of two Pulitzer Prizes, who (to the consternation of his publishers) has recently written a serious, quickly remaindered book called *Some Americans: The Sense of Being in the USA,* and is currently at work on a sequel. Citrine is haunted by his memories of his late friend and mentor Von Humboldt Fleisher, a poet whose book of ballads, published in the Thirties, was "an immediate hit." The character of Humboldt is based largely on Delmore Schwartz, who was a close friend of Bellow's in New York.

Humboldt's Gift may well be the best of Bellow's longer novels. If so, it is in part because, for once, a character besides the narrator—a character whom one does *not* identify with Bellow—is allowed to occupy center stage, allowed to become a symbol of virtue and knowledge, a role usually reserved only for Bellow's narrator-protagonists. The book also conveys more genuine feeling than the typical Bellow novel: Bellow's wistful affection for Schwartz, and for the lost youth and shared dreams that his memory represents, comes through clearly. Besides, Schwartz, like the typical Bellow protagonist, talked obsessively about philosophical and social issues, and peppered his conversations with the names of great leaders and thinkers. If the conversation of many Bellow characters seems contrived, then, Humboldt's conversation—based, as it is, on Schwartz's—is believable. And finally, *Humboldt's Gift* is eminently readable simply because one knows that, to an extent anyway, it is a roman à clef, and Delmore Schwartz was one of the most colorful literary figures of his time.

Yet the novel does not stray very far afield from Bellow's usual themes, for many of his obsessions were also Schwartz's:

> The noble idea of being an American poet certainly made Humboldt feel at times like a card, a boy, a comic, a fool. We lived like bohemians and graduate students in a mood of fun and

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> games. Maybe America didn't need art and inner miracles. It had so many outer ones. The USA was a big operation, very big. The more *it,* the less *we.* So Humboldt behaved like an eccentric and a comic subject. But occasionally there was a break in his eccentricity when he stopped and thought. He tried to think himself clear away from this American world (I did that, too). I could see that Humboldt was pondering what to do between *then* and *now,* between birth and death, to satisfy certain great questions.

Humboldt had high hopes; he felt that with America's rise to world power, philistinism was finished. But Humboldt's pipe dreams of the empowerment of intellectuals fell through, and he eventually went mad. As his star fell, Citrine's was on the rise. Citrine became an insider, while Humboldt became more and more of an outsider, living in flea-bag hotels in the Times Square area. Citrine remembers Humboldt telling him "that poets ought to figure out how to get around pragmatic America." Citrine has gotten around pragmatic America by writing trash ("*Von Trenck* ran for eight months on Broadway. I had the attention of the public for nearly a year, and I taught it nothing"); Humboldt stuck by his guns to the end, and perished.

The passages in which Citrine recalls Humboldt have a vividness and empathy that are rare in Bellow. But, alas, the novel—especially the latter part—is devoted mostly to more recent events, notably Citrine's harassment by a flashy, gun-toting thug named Rinaldo Cantabile, who cheated him out of some money at cards. "I had gone out one evening to amuse myself in vulgar company," Citrine explains, "and I had fallen into the moronic inferno"—that is, into the perilous chaos of America. Like Sammler's black pickpocket, Cantabile has a "natural imagination," an instinctive desire to humiliate intellectuals by forcing them into situations of physical intimacy: instead of exposing himself, he forces Citrine to stand in a bathroom stall with him while he defecates.

The principal reason for the thug Cantabile's interest in Citrine, ridiculously enough, is that he wants him to help Mrs. Cantabile with her dissertation (yes, dissertation) on Humboldt. That Mrs. Cantabile is writing such a dissertation is, to Citrine's mind, a manifestation of the fact that "[t]he country is proud of its dead poets. It takes terrible satisfaction in the poets' testimony that the USA is too tough, too big, too much, too rugged, that American reality is overpowering . . . . So poets are loved, but loved because they just can't make it here." The novel's ultimate irony is that Citrine is enriched by a "gift" from Humboldt that Cantabile's wife unearths: a film script that Humboldt and Citrine wrote together years ago and that, thanks to Cantabile, goes into production. Compared to the parts of the novel in which Humboldt is remembered, these non-Humboldt portions are pallid and familiar; the situation is contrived, the ironies heavy-handed, the character of Cantabile hard to buy. The truth is that *Humboldt's Gift* comes alive, really, only when Citrine is remembering Humboldt. Perhaps this is intentional—a way of suggesting that the life has gone out of Citrine's existence—but it makes for a novel which, though very engaging at the start, becomes less and less interesting.

The first novel that Bellow published after winning the 1976 Nobel Prize in Literature was *The Dean's December* (1982). It is a weak novel, perhaps Bellow's weakest since *Dangling Man.* The dean of the title is Albert Corde, a professor of journalism at a Chicago university and, like Herzog and Citrine before him, the author of solemn tracts on American life—namely, two notorious articles for *Harper's* magazine about crime and punishment in Chicago, which have earned him a reputation as a racist. The novel—which concerns Corde's journey to Bucharest with his Rumanian-born wife to see her dying mother—is concerned largely with comparing American society (which Bellow again refers to as a "moronic inferno") to the "penitentiary societ[y]" of Rumania. Or, more specifically, comparing the disadvan-

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tages of American life to the disadvantages of Rumanian life. The American phenomena to which Bellow pays the most attention in this novel are crime and pollution. Shortly before Corde's departure for Rumania, a student of his is killed by two black men, one of them a friend of his nephew Mason (as in *Mr. Sammler's Planet,* then, Bellow uses blacks to symbolize, in part, the horrors of contemporary American life). And a scientist named Beech describes to Corde the horrifying extent to which, according to his figures, the air, water, and soil of America have been poisoned by industrial deposits of lead; "[c]hronic lead insult," he concludes, "now affects all mankind." Needless to say, Bellow neither shows us the murder nor dramatizes the effect of "chronic lead insult": these horrors are just talked about.

So much for America. As for Rumania, Corde does not experience very much of life in that country and what does happen to him there is not of great interest. The novel's prime example of the horrors of life behind the Iron Curtain is the strictness of hospital visitation rules. Nonetheless, it is something of a relief to follow a Bellow hero around Bucharest, for a change, instead of doing another tour of New York or Chicago. Besides, given his obsession with the horrors of America, the few observations that Bellow does have to offer about life and death in the Communist world are of special interest; and the very act of placing his comments about American politics, society, and culture in the context of the Soviet bloc strikes one as something that he should perhaps have thought to do a long time ago. Yet on the whole *The Dean's December* must be counted as one of Bellow's slacker, more mechanical efforts. It reads like the work of a tired man; Bellow seems merely to be going through the motions, recycling the usual remarks about civilization and its discontents more out of habit than out of conviction.

Which brings us, at last, to Bellow's newest production, *More Die of Heartbreak,* which may be the least satisfying of Bellow's later novels. Kenneth Trachtenberg, the novel's narrator, is a young assistant professor of Russian studies in an unnamed city that sounds very much like Chicago. His name is a combination of the German words meaning "to strive or aspire" and "mountain or hill." But his professional aspirations are modest; his career is less important to him than his relationship with his uncle Benn Crader, a distinguished botanist past his middle years whom Kenneth has come to the Midwest to be near. In the maddening way of many a Bellow speaker, Kenneth's narration meanders like the conversation of a barroom drunk from one anecdote or idea or putative witticism to another, and only after a hundred or so pages does it become clear what the novel is "about": Benn's ill-advised, and ill-fated, marriage to a beautiful young WASP heiress named Matilda Layamon. Benn compares Matilda's beauty to that of Helen of Troy, as described in Poe's poem; the lines are quoted several times in the course of the novel. (The name *Layamon* may derive from the fact that the poem *Brut* by the medieval author Layamon is a historical chronicle that begins with the fall of Troy.) It is a marriage that the naïve, romantic scientist enters into behind Kenneth's back, and after the wedding he finds himself regretting it. Matilda's tastes are expensive, beyond what Benn can afford even on his generous salary; and Matilda's wealthy father, Dr. Layamon, is a sharp businessman who, having discovered that Benn once owned the land on which the city's tallest structure, the Electronic Tower, is built, tries to persuade him to sue his crooked cousin Vilitzer, who negotiated the sale and kept most of the several million dollars of profit. Yet Benn resists Dr. Layamon's pressure, and eventually asserts his independence and humanity in a decisive manner.

Readers of Bellow's previous novels may well feel that they have already met many of these characters and observed many of these situations. Vilitzer, for instance, is the latest in a long line of businessman-thugs in Bellow's fiction; and the financial conflict

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between him and Benn recalls a passage in *The Dean's December,* describing the way that Corde's cousin Max, having been given Corde's power of attorney, swindled him in a real-estate transaction. Like Corde, Kenneth is the son of a playboy; Benn, for his part, recalls a number of scientists in previous Bellow novels, including the eminent scientist named Beech in *The Dean's December.* Matilda is in many ways a retread of Madeleine, the beautiful young wife whom Moses Herzog married without his family's approval (and whose father, like Matilda's, expresses an abnormal, and vulgar, curiosity about her sex life). As in *Herzog,* we are supposed to sympathize with the no-longer-young man for finding himself tied to such a shallow, grasping *shiksa*; never does it seem to occur to either Bellow or his narrator that a man would have to be pretty shallow himself to marry a beautiful woman, many years his junior, without even noticing until after the wedding how incompatible her interests, tastes, and ambitions were with his.

Indeed, Matilda is yet another Bellow female who, for all her accomplishments (and often these Bellow females *are* highly educated), is patently meant to be seen, first and foremost, as a beautiful bitch—or, in the words of *Herzog,* a "frigid, middlebrow, castrating female." One Bellow novel after another characterizes women as disloyal, as unsatisfied with a single man. In *Mr. Sammler's Planet,* for instance, Angela Gruner, after several drinks, admits that "[a] Jew brain, a black cock, a Nordic beauty . . . is what a woman wants." In *More Die of Heartbreak,* Kenneth's cousin Fishl says that "candid women will tell you, I'd like some of this and some of that—a little Muhammed Ali for straight sex, some of Kissinger for savvy, Cary Grant for looks, Jack Nicholson for entertainment, plus André Malraux or some Jew for brains. Commonest fantasy there is. Unfortunately you have to limit your catch to one." How cruel these women can be! Toward the end of *Herzog,* when Madeleine looks at her ex-husband across a courtroom, her eyes "expressed a total will that he should die"; in *Seize the Day,* Tommy Wilhelm complains that his estranged wife "has fixed herself on me to kill me." So uncharitably does Bellow characterize the female of the species that it is almost as if he regards feminine pulchritude as a wile, a cunning means of ensnaring trustful men, of distracting them from their families, their responsibilities, and their allegiance to the true, the good, and the more spiritually beautiful.

One very noticeable fact in *More Die of Heartbreak* is that all the characters talk the same way: the young Paris-bred Russian scholar, the WASP doctor and his daughter, the aging Jewish botanist, and so forth. They're all egregiously vulgar, and indeed often sound like character actors playing thugs. For instance, Kenneth—who is supposed to be sensitive and intelligent—describes his attraction to Treckie, the mother of his child, as follows: "This sexual kid, I went for her." (Kenneth is yet another Bellow protagonist who is estranged from his woman and child.) He speaks of himself as reading "Russian stuff," describes a woman as being "twigged out," says that "Uncle had whatchamacallit for me—charisma," describes Dr. Layamon as a "hotshot" and his own father as a "cocksman" and "such a dude," and says of Matilda that she is the sort of woman who "didn't have to futz around in Paris with all that postwar sleaze." Similarly, Dr. Layamon calls Benn a "cocksman" and refers to "the way they fart around in these glitzy restaurants." Matilda too uses the word "glitz"; Benn, for his part, uses words like "stumblebum." Then there's Kenneth's cousin Fishl, who speaks of Layamon as a "creepo" and asks rhetorically, "[W]hat's so distinguished about letting people screw you?"; and Kenneth's friend Dita Schwartz, who says, "I don't understand this rage for titless broads"; and Treckie's mother, who says that ski instructors "have all the sack traffic they can handle."

They *all* talk this way. Indeed, part of the reason, I think, for everybody talking in the same lowbrow fashion is that Bellow labors under the delusion that it takes the sting off the pretentious things that people say to

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have them say it in gutterese. (As somebody says to Moses Herzog, "You're not like those university phonies. You're a *mensch.*") What's more, they all seem to have the same range of reference: Treckie's mother refers to Auden; Fishl, a crude operator, compares himself to Edgar in *King Lear.* Finally, the characters in *More Die of Heartbreak* all play what one might call the "synonym game"—they say the same thing two, three, four times in a row, in slightly different words, as if the author, unable to decide among the possible alternatives, decided to use them all. For example, at one point in the narrative Kenneth announces that "out of the troubled landscape there appears, takes shape, materializes, the somnambulistic form of Caroline Bunge."

All of these aspects of *More Die of Heartbreak* should be rather familiar to the reader of Bellow's previous novels; but in the present novel these elements of the Bellovian manner are even more noticeable—and more irritating—than in its predecessors. At times, indeed, Bellow seems to be wearing his less fortunate stylistic habits on his sleeve, to be making little wise-guy jokes about his characteristic manner. More than once, for instance, he has Kenneth apologize to the reader for allowing himself to be "sidetracked." When Kenneth plays the synonym game in the course of defining the word *arcanum* ("it's what you have to know in order to be fertile in a creative pursuit, to make discoveries, to prepare for the communication of a spiritual mystery"), he adds parenthetically: "Excuse the language; I'm in a hurry and I can't stop to pick and choose among the available terms." And at one point Bellow has Kenneth say, "I take very little pleasure in theories and I'm not going to dump ideas on you."

Au contraire, naturally. As usual, there's a new theory, idea, cultural observation, or philosophical *mot* trotted out on virtually every page of *More Die of Heartbreak.* Some of this talk is interesting enough:

> Death . . . while you enjoy a viewer's immunity from it, is entertaining, as it was in imperial Rome, or in 1793. As, today, Sadat is murdered, Indira Gandhi is assassinated, the Pope himself is gunned down in St. Peter's Square, while, personally unharmed, *you* live to see more and more and more, until after many deferrals death gets personal even with you. The jumpmaster says, "You bail out next."

But Kenneth's brief passage about his profession—to choose one from dozens of possible examples—strikes one as obvious, easy, tired:

> Being an academic is quite a thing. You can take my word for this because I'm an academic myself. I don't say that I'm sold on being one, only that I am one—for the time being, marginally—an assistant professor of Russian literature. Exciting to me, but how many are worked up over such studies—compared, say, to Bruce Springsteen or Colonel Qaddafi or the majority leader of the U.S. Senate?

Indeed, Kenneth himself, as a character, is rather obvious, easy, and tired. He resembles Bellow less than previous Bellow protagonists; but he is not very much like anyone else either. Alas, he's barely there at all. It's as if Bellow wanted to focus less on his protagonist than he generally does, in order to be able to accord greater attention to the secondary characters; he does so, however, not by strengthening the secondary characters but by weakening the protagonist. The fact is that we do not really know Kenneth, and we cannot believe in his supposedly powerful emotional bond with his Uncle Benn (an out-of-the-ordinary attachment that recalls, among other things, Herzog's unusually strong affection for his brother Will, Tommy Wilhelm's intense desire for his father's love, and the special uncle-nephew and uncle-niece relationships in various other Bellow novels). Nor do we know Benn well enough to understand why Kenneth might be so attached to him, or why Kenneth, from the very beginning, perceives Benn's marriage to Matilda Layamon as a terrible idea. And it is hard to understand Kenneth's conviction that it would be

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wrong for Benn to heed Dr. Layamon's pleas and sue the crooked Vilitzer. Alas, there are too many things, in this novel, that Bellow unreasonably expects one to understand intuitively.

Saul Bellow deserves admiration for many reasons. One can have nothing but respect for his ceaseless preoccupation with such serious themes as the "sacredness of life" (as he puts it in *Sammler*) and the interconnectedness of all humanity; what is unfortunate is that he explicitly insists on these things more often than he conveys a sense of them. It is praiseworthy, too, that Bellow's novels are so concerned with the making of one's soul, with the question of how one should lead one's life; but sometimes his protagonists seem to think of nothing else, and at such moments the novels read like exercises in solipsism. Bellow's love of ideas is admirable as well; one wishes only that rather than wandering capriciously (as he frequently seems to do) from idea to idea, he would make a greater effort to subsume his inevitable battery of sociological observations, metaphysical musings, and learned quotations to more rigorously structured plots and more thoroughly and realistically developed sets of characters. It is wonderful that Bellow is so determined to write novels of ideas; the problem is that he is usually more interested in the ideas than in the novel.

All too frequently, moreover, Bellow's discursive passages—especially those in which he attempts to characterize American life and the modern sensibility—strike one as remarkably misguided. For example, he speaks of such universal human qualities as ambition and carnal passion as if they were peculiar to the twentieth century or the United States; and he refers to the philistinism of the bulk of the American public as if it were some sort of gross historical anomaly, as if it were reasonable to expect most people in any society to be intellectuals. In his more than four decades as a novelist, Bellow has taken what may well be an unparalleled number of facile jabs at American life. (For instance, Herzog, in jail for a day, reflects that a prison cell "was not the sphere of his sins . . . . Out in the streets, in American society, that was where he did his time.") Bellow suggests that in America today the opinions and ideas of a single individual count for less than ever, when the fact is that nowadays articulate and intelligent people, who in previous centuries might have been mute inglorious Miltons, stand a far better chance than ever before of finding a suitable forum and a sizable audience for whatever they have to say. Bellow also suggests that individuals are more than ever forced to endure lives of bleak, mechanical routine, subordinated to things larger than themselves—big government, advanced technology—when, in truth, as a result of the advancements of technology, fewer and fewer people are called upon these days to perform the sort of menial, dehumanizing tasks to which the majority of human beings, until this century, had to devote most of their waking hours. Bellow hammers home his dark pronouncements on the way we live now with such insistence that one often has the impression that he considers it his duty to find something uncheering to say about any topic that may happen to come his way; at times it even appears as if he is doing his best to squeeze some great general truth out of every episode that he writes, whether or not such a thing is actually hiding in there.

So distinct is Bellow's novelistic method that it does not seem excessive to describe his novels as a subgenre unto themselves—a subgenre of books that are "successful" only to the extent that they provide a framework within which he can talk about his favorite subjects with some semblance of formal justification. It is, moreover, because of this difference between Bellow's novels and those of other contemporary American writers that one cannot easily compare his achievement to theirs. Certainly he is one of the most intelligent—perhaps *the* most intelligent—of novelists working today; but the question of how distinguished his novels are, *as novels,* remains. It has been argued by many writers and critics, of course, that

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superior intelligence is not required to write even a great novel, and that, indeed, a brilliant mind can be a definite drawback for a novelist—when, presumably, it is not accompanied by an equally strong aesthetic sense. To be sure, *Seize the Day* demonstrated that Bellow is capable of writing something taut and beautifully focused, of reining in his tendency to talk his themes to death. Yet it somehow seems unlikely, at this stage of the game, that Bellow will produce another such book. What is far more likely, alas, is that—having long since settled into a mode that affords him endless opportunities to indulge his penchant for cerebral chatter—Saul Bellow will keep on talking.

David Cregeen

The Egyptian Shadow.
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The happy critic: Arthur Danto in *The Nation*

by Hilton Kramer

My aim is to show that we have entered a period of post-historical art, where the need for constant self-revolutionization of art is now past. There can and should never again be anything like the astonishing sequence of convulsions that have defined the art history of our century . . . . In a sense, the post-historical atmosphere of art will return art to human ends. The fermentation of the twentieth century will prove to have been terminal, but exciting as it has been to live through it, we are entering a more stable, more happy period of artistic endeavor where the basic needs to which art has always been responsive may again be met.

—Arthur C. Danto, in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (1986)

I am suggesting that . . . there are to be no next things. The time for next things is past. The end of art coincides with the end of a history of art that has that kind of structure. After that there is nothing to do but live happily ever after. It was like coming to the end of the world with no more continents to discover. One must now begin to make habitable the only continents that there are. One must learn to live within the limits of the world.

As I see it, this means returning art to the serving of largely human ends.

—Arthur C. Danto, in *The State of the Art* (1987)

Long wedded to the academic traditions of philosophical rumination, Arthur C. Danto —Johnsonian Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University and a former president of the American Philosophical Association—entered upon an entirely new phase of his intellectual career when, at the age of sixty-three, he took up the post of art critic on *The Nation*. It was, in some respects, an odd development. That Professor Danto took a keen interest in contemporary art had been apparent from the kind of philosophical writing he had been devoting to it for some years. But the writing itself had never left one with the impression that it was the work of a man whose habitual response to works of art was first of all a critical response. For it was not the specific artistic achievement, or lack of achievement, to be found in what artists produced that seemed to constitute a compelling interest for Professor Danto. More often than not, what captured his attention was something else: the philosophical questions that certain modalities of art—and not necessarily those that yielded the greatest results—might conceivably give rise to. Such an interest was entirely proper, of course, in the work of an academic philosopher. Yet it was bound to be an inauspicious starting point from which to make the leap into the very different realm of critical judgment. For in that realm an interest in ideas, though not to be spurned, is hardly a substitute for that faculty of sensibility we call taste. And in the matter of taste—well, it remained to be seen what the Johnsonian Professor of Philosophy might have to offer us when, for the first time, he got around to the task of actually criticizing particular works of art.

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It should be noted that Professor Danto came to this task at a moment when the entire field of art criticism was in something of a slump. There were some admirable exceptions, to be sure, but by and large the combined pressures of a rampant commercialism, an excessive politicization, and an incontinent academic obscurantism had succeeded in rendering the bulk of the criticism to be found in the art press and in the major exhibition catalogues either entirely unreadable, entirely unreliable, or utterly nonsensical. It also happened that Professor Danto's appointment came at a moment when *The Nation,* which in earlier times had boasted a glittering roster of critical eminences, was itself at a nadir as far as its criticism of the arts was concerned. Given this conjunction of bleak circumstance, the entry of a professional philosopher into the world of critical journalism was certain to cause a stir, and it did. An audience yearning for clarity, intelligence, and disinterestedness was ready to give Professor Danto its attention.

At the same time, however, his appointment to this critical post, though it gave promise of a certain seriousness, also raised some troubling questions. Since a facile and often unconscionable misuse of certain philosophical texts—Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and sundry Marxian theorists—accounted for the woeful and sometimes hilarious muddle into which so much art criticism had lately degenerated, there was naturally some curiosity as to whether the arrival on the scene of the Johnsonian Professor of Philosophy would bring an effective antidote to the worst abuses or only another symptom of a malpractice that was already so noxious. Then, too, there was a further question about exactly how disinterested, in purely political terms, any critic writing regularly for *The Nation* under its current editorship could be expected to be. The days had long since passed when there was a discernible split in *The Nation* between its political pages, which in the magazine's heyday were famously Stalinist, and its back-of-the-book arts pages, which were once conspicuously independent of that deadly influence. As a journal of opinion, *The Nation* is nowadays nothing if not consistent and all-of-a-piece, front and back, and so it was inevitable that a question should arise as to how its new art critic would fit into the magazine's current ideological outlook.

To these questions, as well as to various others raised by Professor Danto's appointment, we are now in a position to seek some provisional answers. Although he embarked upon his new duties at *The Nation* a scant three years ago, Professor Danto has not been laggard about collecting the fruits of his critical labors in book form. Clearly he is pleased with the results to date, and eager to share them with a wider readership. The very title he has given his first volume of criticism —*The State of the Art*[1]—speaks, moreover, for the kind of easy certainty that it often takes non-philosophical critics a much longer period of observation and reflection to acquire. In this respect, at least, there are evidently some advantages in coming to criticism from a long career in academic philosophy. If the latter cannot be said to be an aid to aesthetic judgment, it will nonetheless be invaluable in providing the critic with a sizable repertory of questions and propositions that can be pressed into service on those occasions—which in the life of a philosophical critic are likely to be fairly numerous—when aesthetic judgment is somehow deemed to be inappropriate to the work under review.

Professor Danto leaves us in little doubt about the relation in which he understands his philosophical interests to stand to his own critical practice. In a prologue to *The State of the Art,* he writes that in his view criticism "has to take the works [of art] on their own terms and find their philosophies for them." (This is a statement that might strike a non-philosophical critic as harboring at least the appearance of a flagrant contradiction, for if as critics we are obliged to "find" philosophies for works of art, in what sense can we still be said to take them "on

1 *The State of the Art,* by Arthur C. Danto; Prentice Hall Press, 228 pages, $19.95.

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their own terms"?) Professor Danto also writes in this prologue that "criticism, in its highest vocation, identifies the thoughts that give life to a work or set of works." It is, then, as a critic concerned, above all, "to articulate the structures of thought and meaning" that may be found in, or attributed to, a work of art that Professor Danto comes to his new vocation.

In this view, clearly, the art criticism written by non-philosophers is automatically debarred from the "highest vocation" that such criticism can hope to attain. And it is not only in this respect that Professor Danto is thought (if only by himself) to enjoy a special authority in this enterprise. He also brings to art criticism what he obviously regards as another indispensable tool: a completely worked out philosophy of art history. It is to his philosophy of art history, in fact, that Professor Danto devotes the last and most important essay in *The State of the Art.* It is to that essay, which is called "Approaching the End of Art," that we must therefore turn if we are fully to understand the columns that Professor Danto has contributed to *The Nation,* a selection of which makes up the bulk of *The State of the Art,* for his separate review articles are properly to be read, I gather, as concrete illustrations of the general theory he has proposed in that curious text.

Professor Danto's theory, though richly larded with appropriate references to Hegel, Heidegger, John Stuart Mill, Nietzsche, Aristotle, and Plato, is easily summarized. The crux of it is to be found in the following proposition: that with Andy Warhol's exhibition of his Brillo boxes at the Stable Gallery in 1964, the history of art—and therefore art itself—came to an end, and everything thereafter produced in the name of art isn't really art at all but belongs rather, if it amounts to anything at all, to the realm of philosophy! About that fateful Warhol exhibition in 1964, Professor Danto writes:

> And with this, it seemed to me, the history of art attained that point where it had to turn into its own philosophy. It had gone, as art, as far as it could go. In turning into philosophy, art had come to an end. From now on progress could only be enacted on a level of abstract self-consciousness of the kind which philosophy alone must consist in. If artists wished to participate in this progress, they would have to undertake a study very different from what the art schools could prepare them for. They would have to become philosophers.

Thus, it isn't only the art critics who, according to the terms of this theory, are judged to have been rendered obsolete by Warhol's historic breakthrough. Artists, too, are on notice that their survival *as artists* will henceforth depend on their willingness to abandon their traditional (but now obsolete) pursuits in order to join the ranks of the philosophical profession. No doubt it is with this prospect in mind that Professor Danto joyfully informs his readers that "there is [now] nothing to do but live happily ever after."

It may seem churlish to decline this invitation to happiness, but before we begin dancing in the streets I think it is worth taking a closer look at this theory of art history. Does it actually tell us something important about the art history—or, for that matter, about the art—of the present age? Or is it just another of those ingenious scenarios that are regularly concocted to relieve the tedium of the seminar room and the philosophical colloquium? One can readily understand why such a theory would commend itself to the Johnsonian Professor of Philosophy at Columbia, of course, for it accords to the professional philosopher—or at least to professors of philosophy—a uniquely privileged position in relation to what has heretofore been thought to be *art.* But the plain truth is, this is not a theory that in any way accounts for the significant achievements of the art of the last quarter century, nor does it contribute anything to our understanding of them. It doesn't even account for the art that Professor Danto is customarily at pains to praise in his columns in *The Nation.* He may claim to believe that "art had come to an

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end" in 1964, but every fortnight or so in *The Nation* he continues to write about the stuff quite as if it were still being produced. And no wonder! For his precious theory is founded on a patent fallacy. Neither Warhol's Brillo boxes nor anything else in his art can be said to have constituted the kind of world-historical event that Professor Danto claims it to have been. What Warhol's art mainly was—and was widely recognized to have been—was something else: a further colonization of the aesthetically arid but nonetheless seductive territory which Marcel Duchamp had opened up decades before and to which the work of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg had lately lent a new status and glamour.

With the advent of the Pop movement in the early Sixties, something important did indeed reach a terminal point, but it wasn't art. It was the age of the avant-garde. To confuse avant-gardism with art itself, which is what Professor Danto has obviously done in this ill-conceived theory of art history, is, to be sure, a common practice. It has been a staple of art-market salesmanship—and, alas, of market-oriented art history—since Pop Art first succeeded in blitzing the media some twenty-five years ago. One hardly expected a philosopher of Professor Danto's attainments to fall for such a shallow misconception, much less make it the cornerstone of a theory of art history, but this is what happens, I suppose, when ideas about art—or, I daresay, about anything else—are so categorically divorced from an experience of the thing itself. I am not suggesting that Professor Danto has no experience of art, or even that his experience is meager. He clearly pays lavish attention to it, and he reminds us in *The State of the Art* that in an earlier period of his life he was an artist himself—a printmaker—before he abandoned that vocation for philosophy. Yet on the evidence of his writings, his experience of art—however rich and varied it may be—appears to repose in a region of the mind that lies beyond the reach of his purely theoretical interests, and it is the latter that dominate his criticism and set the terms of its analysis. One has the impression, in fact, that in isolation from these theoretical interests, the experience of art—perhaps even the work of art itself—is somehow deemed to lack sufficient ontology to merit a central role in shaping his critical thought.

As a result of the division that obtains in Professor Danto's art criticism between the interests of philosophy and the realities of art, the essays in *The State of the Art* that are devoted to individual artists—especially contemporary artists—seldom succeed in illuminating anything very concrete in the art itself. It must also be said that these essays are often crammed with the most pretentious irrelevancies. Consider, for example, the following passage from Professor Danto's essay on the recent Franz Kline retrospective. He is talking about that moment in the late Forties when Kline moved from representation to abstraction in his painting.

> But then, at a certain moment in 1948 or 1949, described for us in a famous passage of Elaine de Kooning's, Kline became Kline in a way so immediate and unpremeditated that the concept of decision has no application. The force that effected the change came from without, and was grasped with the certitude of a mystical revelation. Kline could have changed his name at that point, as Saint Paul did, so slight was the continuity between the new Kline and the old. It can be argued that this particular revelation could have been granted only to someone who had had specifically the life in art that Kline had had up to the shattering self-disclosure, but it can also be argued that had it not been for an almost entirely accidental intervention, like a fate, Kline would simply have gone on as he had been. It was a moment like the falling of the apple in the myth of Newton, or the fluorescence of a nearby barium screen in the case of Röntgen, or the flames the dozing Kekulé saw as interlocked snakes when he got the idea of the benzene ring. Or like Proust's tasting of the madeleine, without which he would have remained the marginally distinguished *belle époque* writer of the works that preceded *Remembrance of Things Past.*

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Or, we might add, like none of the above. What had happened was this: On a visit to Willem de Kooning's studio toward the end of 1948, Kline had seen some of his black and white drawings blown up to wall-scale by means of an opaque projector, and this is said to have triggered his move into large-scale black and white abstraction. To describe that move as "unpremeditated" or "almost entirely accidental" is ridiculous. Kline wasn't ignorant about what was going on in American painting that year; he hadn't come to de Kooning's studio to receive instruction in trompe l'oeil illusionism.

In the spring of 1948 de Kooning had his first one-man show. Reviewing that exhibition at the time, Clement Greenberg—Professor Danto's predecessor on *The Nation*—noted that the paintings were mainly executed in "black, gray, tan, and white," and then went on to make the following observations:

> For de Kooning black becomes a color—not the indifferent schema of drawing, but a hue with all the resonance, ambiguity, and variability of the prismatic scale. Spread smoothly in somatic shapes on an uncrowded canvas, this black identifies the physical picture plane with an emphasis other painters achieve only by clotted pigment. De Kooning's insistence on a smooth, thin surface is a concomitant of his desire for purity, for an art that makes demands only on the optical imagination.[2]

De Kooning emerged from that first solo exhibition as one of the leaders of the Abstract Expressionist movement, and he was by no means alone in that movement in according to the use of black paint a special role in the new pictorial aesthetic. Earlier that same year Jackson Pollock had also shown some new abstract paintings in which black, white, and aluminum paint predominated. This was the period in which Robert Motherwell was beginning to produce the black and white images that would shortly lead to the *Elegy* series. Richard Pousette-Dart, Clyfford Still, and Bradley Walker Tomlin were all working in analogous ways. Kline, who belonged to what might be called the "second wave" of the Abstract Expressionist movement, was at that moment clearly looking for a point of entry into the new aesthetic. He may have found it in de Kooning's studio, but there was nothing remotely "accidental" about the decisions he then made about his art. All those fancy references to Newton, Röntgen, Kekulé, and Proust—not to mention Saint Paul and "the certitude of a mystical revelation"—do nothing but obscure the whole subject.

It would be tedious to recount the many similar passages in *The State of the Art* that divert the reader's attention from the actualities of art for the sake of indulging in all manner of irrelevant allusion. It is in such passages, I suppose, that Professor Danto believes himself to be identifying "the thoughts that give life to a work or set of works," but the only thing really being identified in writing of this sort is the author's incurable pedantry. And it is not only in relation to contemporary art, moreover, that Professor Danto is pleased to exhibit such pedantry. Historical exhibitions also afford him ample opportunity to play the cheerful academic. Professor Danto evidently believes he has made an astounding discovery: that certain exhibitions have the effect of distorting or enhancing the significance of the works of art they contain. Just imagine! You or I might regard this observation as—well, somewhat commonplace. It is, after all, the sort of thing that experienced museumgoers pick up on quite quickly. But that response would only show how unphilosophical we are. In Professor Danto this commonplace observation inspires the need to adumbrate a theory. He appears, anyway, to be under the impression that in the course of writing the articles collected in this book he began, as he says, "to articulate certain theses regarding the logic of exhibitions themselves." With what he calls "a certain mock seriousness," but which I should describe as

2 From *The Nation,* April 24, 1948. The article is reprinted in Volume 2 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism,* edited by John O'Brian (University of Chicago Press, 1986).

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an involuntary tendency to self-parody, he gives to this writing about "the logic of exhibitions" the august name of *Ausstellungskritik*. "My thought is," he writes, "that an exhibition stands to works [of art] as a sentence stands to words, and that it says something of great philosophical meaning that works should be thought of in terms of the syntax of different exhibitional structures." But is it in any sense true that an exhibition bears to the works of art it encompasses the same relation that a sentence bears to the words it contains? I doubt it. Because works of art have a specific aesthetic gravity—an independent aesthetic existence—that words in themselves can never have, works of art are not at all like words. Nor are exhibitions in the least like sentences, and only a professional philosopher could bring himself to believe such a thing. All that this overblown notion of *Ausstellungskritik* amounts to, I am afraid, is another comical misapplication of Structuralist theory—always, nowadays, a telltale sign of academic obfuscation.

But let us return to Professor Danto's "end of art" idea. What effect, if any, does it have on his own critical judgment of the new art he encounters in the museums and galleries? At first glance, it would seem to have none. His critical opinions are mostly the received opinions of the moment. The paintings of Leon Golub are said "as if in answer to his prayer, [to] touch at last on artistic greatness." Jennifer Bartlett is said to be in command of "an exceptional creative force and an unmistakable authenticity." Eric Fischl's paintings are found to be "beautifully brushed and deeply intelligent," whereas Julian Schnabel's, though said to exhibit "genuine talent," are dismissed as "fuel for the engines of the art market." (In the fuel-for-the-engines-of-the-art-market department, do we really have instruments fine enough to measure the difference between Jennifer Bartlett and Julian Schnabel? If Professor Danto has made a discovery here, I wish he would disclose it.) In other words, more commonplaces. But it hardly matters. Critical judgment is not really Professor Danto's forte. And it is interesting to observe that even in this "post-historical" period when the "end of art" is said to have occurred, the works of Golub, Bartlett, Fischl, et al. are discussed by Professor Danto as if they are works of art, after all. For reasons that are perfectly understandable, even Professor Danto is evidently reluctant to welcome Jennifer Bartlett into the sacred precincts of philosophy.

On a closer examination, however, it will be readily seen that Professor Danto's "end of art" idea does have a role to play in his critical outlook. By announcing that there are now to be "no next things" in art, Professor Danto can comfortably philosophize about whatever aesthetic phenomena the art world happens to be packaging at the moment without having to bother very much with questions of quality. In a period that Professor Danto has heralded as "post-historical"—his not very useful term for what others call postmodern—critical judgments are finally unimportant, for even bad art, even non-art, can be found to have a "meaning." And Professor Danto is never so happy as when he can "find" a meaning to convey to us. For him, indeed, art has been effectively pre-empted by meaning. Which is why, perhaps, this happy critic had to wait until he believed the "end of art" had occurred before he could undertake to offer us criticism "in its highest vocation."

Thinking about this "end of art" theory, I am reminded of another, earlier "end of" theory that once enjoyed a certain intellectual vogue. I mean Daniel Bell's quaint notion that in the Fifties we had happily arrived at the "end of ideology." Remember the "end of ideology"? It made quite a splash in its day. But as a theory, as we were soon to learn, it turned out to be one of the really spectacular misapprehensions of history in our time. My prediction is that Professor Danto's "end of art" theory will meet with a similar fate. Except perhaps in the realm of philosophical rumination, neither history nor art is so easily disposed of. Certainly art criticism cannot dispose of them without rendering itself utterly fatuous.

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The academy debates the canon

by Roger Kimball

Everywhere across the country students and professors are returning to their cloistered groves, eager after a restful summer to put behind them "vain deluding joys" and devote themselves anew to the pursuit of liberal learning. Everywhere the lecture halls are humming, the libraries echoing, the quads and courtyards bustling with a new term's academic traffic. Yet there are numerous signs that all is not well in shady academe. It is not just that the image of our colleges and universities as "cloistered groves" has become quaintly ludicrous in the face of a widespread debasement of manners and decorum. There is also an uneasy sense that American higher education, especially in the humanities, has lost its way; Milton's "vain deluding joys" seem at home as much in the university as anywhere, and the very notion that a traditional humanistic education could be spiritually enriching and intellectually liberating is typically greeted with a mixture of irony and disdain.

Neither the irony nor the disdain has dulled the sense of crisis, however, and the last year or two have been witness to a proliferation of books, articles, conferences, symposia, and reports that ponder the current state and prospects of American education. Much attention in particular has been devoted to the question of the literary canon: its origins, its composition, and the desirability of preserving the values and traditions it embodies. It was to such matters, for example, that Yale University's Whitney Humanities Center lately devoted a remarkable public symposium called "Literary Theory and the Curriculum"—an event so representative of the current crisis that it is worth examining in some detail.

But before turning to that event, certain other developments need to be considered. Perhaps the most widely noticed contributions to this debate in recent years are also among the most reviled in the academy: E. D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*[1] and Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*.[2] They are very different sorts of books. Professor Hirsch's study is a cross between a report and a primer; Professor Bloom's is more in the way of a philosophical meditation on the fate of liberal education in contemporary American society. But both books are highly critical of the current situation in the academy. And both have garnered extraordinary public attention: *The Closing of the American Mind* was number one on *The New York Times* best-seller list for many weeks

1 *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, by E. D. Hirsch, Jr.; Houghton Mifflin, 251 pages, $16.95.

2 *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*, by Allan Bloom; Simon & Schuster, 392 pages, $18.95. See David Gress's article on Bloom's book, "Diagnosis of a *Kulturkampf*," in the May, 1987 issue of *The New Criterion*.

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this summer, while *Cultural Literacy* followed close behind at number two. Whether all or even most of those who bought the books also took the trouble to read them—especially Professor Bloom's book, which is not exactly what is usually meant by summer reading—is of course a good question. One hazards not. Nevertheless, their commercial success suggests how widespread, if inchoate, is the concern about the state of American education.

Much of this concern originally crystallized around Secretary of Education William J. Bennett's now-notorious monograph, *To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education*, published by the National Endowment for the Humanities in November, 1984, when Secretary Bennett was chairman of the Endowment. Retailing the recent tribulations of the humanities in the academy—ignorance and apathy on the one hand, overt politicization on the other—the report insisted that "the nation's colleges and universities must reshape their curricula based on a clear vision of what constitutes an educated person." The goal was "a common culture rooted in civilization's lasting vision, its highest shared ideals and aspirations, and its heritage," and Secretary Bennett did not hesitate to name Western civilization as the repository of these "ideals and aspirations," or to provide a list of books that help define the "lasting vision" of that common culture.

Naturally, Secretary Bennett's report occasioned paroxysms of rage in the academy.[3] The vision of a common culture, the notion that the West's achievements have a special claim on our attention and allegiance, the criticism of importing politics into the humanities, the effrontery of suggesting that a particular list of books should be considered canonical: all this drew sharp denunciations from *bien-pensant* academics across the country.

Nor have the denunciations ceased. In a recent issue of the humanities quarterly *Salmagundi,* for example, we find a lengthy exchange entitled "On Cultural Literacy: Canon, Class, Curriculum."[4] Professor Robert Scholes of Brown University set the tone and agenda of the exchange with an essay coyly entitled "Aiming a Canon at the Curriculum." Several academics, including Professor Hirsch, Marjorie Perloff of the University of Southern California, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese of Emory University, and John P. Sisk of Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, responded.

Professor Scholes began with some rather silly etymological speculations on the relation between the terms "canon" and "cannon," concluding ominously that "Where the Empire went, the cannon and the Canon went too." But the real focus of his essay was Secretary Bennett's report, especially its advocacy of a literary canon, and Professor Hirsch's miscellaneous writings on "cultural literacy" (the book had not yet appeared). About *To Reclaim a Legacy,* Professor Scholes wrote that "I am opposed to the establishment of a canon in humanistic studies because I believe such a move to be fundamentally undemocratic: a usurpation of curricular power by the federal government." He then proceeded to invoke Adolf Hitler, telling us that "William Bennett's cry for strong leadership from those on top combined with the charge that the loss of our legacy is the fault of a 'failure of nerve and faith' strongly suggests that the first move of an educational leader should be a purge of those lacking in nerve and faith."

There is a good deal that could be said about Professor Scholes's observations. The allusion to Hitler gives a fair indication of the level on which his thinking about these issues proceeds. But more troubling—because more likely to be taken seriously—is the suggestion that "the establishment of a canon in humanistic studies" is "fundamentally undemocratic." This idea is as pernicious as it is common, implying as it does

3 I detailed one display of this rage in "Debating the Humanities At Yale," *The New Criterion*, June, 1986, pp. 23-33.

4 *Salmagundi* No. 72, Fall, 1986, pp. 101-165.

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that democracy is essentially inimical to authority, tradition, and rigor. It might also be noted that Professor Scholes's description of *To Reclaim a Legacy* descends to the crudest caricature. For one thing, as John Sisk points out in his response, though the document appears over Secretary Bennett's name, it is in fact the report of a committee. Its substance, moreover, is not the result of Secretary Bennett's private whims but a reflection of the deliberations of a distinguished panel of professors and university administrators whose numbers included figures as diverse as William Arrowsmith, William M. Banks, Hannah H. Gray, and Paul Oskar Kristeller. One wonders what they would think about the allusion to Hitler. Then, too, Professor Scholes acts as if Secretary Bennett had wanted the list of books included in the report to be dogmatically imposed on the nation's colleges and universities. The truth is precisely the opposite. "In providing a list of these works and authors," we read in *To Reclaim a Legacy,* "it is not my intention (nor is it my right) to dictate anyone's curriculum. My purpose is not to prescribe a course of studies but to answer, as candidly as I can, an oft-asked question."

The responses to Professor Scholes's essay covered a fair range of opinion but may be described as generally sympathetic—no one, at any rate, felt inclined to defend *To Reclaim a Legacy.* Marjorie Perloff, for one, praised Professor Scholes's "eloquent, humane" critique of the report's defense of the canon, agreeing that "educational philosophy always masks political ideology." To her credit, however, she did point out that there is an unacknowledged, yet nonetheless rigidly adhered to, alternative canon already in place in the academy. This is the canon whose founders are Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche, and whose contemporary representatives champion a motley variety of "avant-garde" criticism based on a combination of liberal political pieties and the half-digested tenets of the latest intellectual fads. As if in illustration of Professor Perloff's claim, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese began her response with an admiring reference to Frantz Fanon's ideal of a "purging violence" and observed that the notions of "imperialism and colonialization . . . nicely capture the relations between many students and the official culture that is taken to constitute a liberal education." "The canon," she concluded, "can best be taught if it is recognized at least in part as a kind of political spoil."

Professor Hirsch's response took the form of an apologia explaining why Professor Scholes's attack on his work has been misplaced. Of course, the chief reason Professor Scholes troubled to criticize Professor Hirsch in the first place is that his work on cultural literacy has been widely described as "conservative"—a tag earned in part because it was endorsed early on by Secretary Bennett (Professor Hirsch was even cited in *To Reclaim a Legacy*), in part because it scrupled to point out what a shambles our country's educational system is in. The wide attention his book has received has made the litany of horrors familiar. Quoting the preliminary findings of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, for example, Professor Hirsch reveals that "two-thirds of the seventeen-year-old students tested could not place the Civil War in the correct half century; a third did not know that the Declaration of Independence was signed between 1750 and 1800; half could not locate the half century in which the First World War occurred; a third did not know that Columbus sailed for the New World 'before 1750'; three-fourths could not identify Walt Whitman or Thoreau or E. E. Cummings or Carl Sandburg. And one-half of our high school seniors did not recognize the names of Winston Churchill or Joseph Stalin."

All this is indeed shocking. And Professor Hirsch is to be commended for bringing it so forcefully to public notice. But it must be said that his defense against Professor Scholes's attack was really a capitulation. The truth is that though Professor Hirsch's writing on cultural literacy has been widely associated with the spirit of *To Reclaim a Legacy,* his response in the pages of *Salmagundi* was little more than an attempt to distance himself from Secretary Bennett, the

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report, and everything they stand for. Replying to one of Professor Scholes's main charges, Professor Hirsch insisted that in his view "*The common background knowledge required for literacy does not depend upon specific texts . . . . To be culturally literate, one does not need to know any specific texts.*" It follows naturally, he continued, that "it's acceptable to take one's entire knowledge of *Romeo and Juliet* from *Cliff Notes*."

This disregard for the substance and texture of humanistic knowledge points to the crippling weakness of *Cultural Literacy*: its thoroughgoing philistinism and superficiality. These defects are writ large in what is at once the most questionable and the most controversial part of Professor Hirsch's book—I mean The List: the sixty-odd-page, alphabetically ordered confection appended to the main text. Entitled "What Literate Americans Know," it is a startling hodgepodge of dates (1066, 1492, 1776, etc.), names, phrases, acronyms, titles, and technical terms. Toward the end of the B's, for example, we encounter:

> Bryan, William Jennings
> bubble chamber
> bubble (economic)
> Bucharest
> buck stops here, The
> Budapest
> Buddha
> Buddhism
> Buenos Aires
> Buffalo, New York
> Buffalo Bill
> buffer (chemistry)
> build castles in the air

What does this random inventory of cultural trivia have to do with genuine education or cultural literacy? Well, about as much as *Cliff Notes* has to do with Shakespeare. It is—to use a phrase that Professor Hirsch favors—simply a promiscuous blend of general "background knowledge," mastery of which might help one excel in crossword puzzles or quiz games, but which is totally alien to the spirit of serious humanistic education. As it happens, Professor Hirsch has been quite frank about the rudimentary nature of his enterprise. Thus in the preface to his book he tells us that "to be culturally literate is to possess the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world"—which is to say that in his terms being culturally literate is more or less like having a plumber's license. Nevertheless, many people have continued to assume that a book entitled "Cultural Literacy" must have something to do with high culture. It is perhaps another measure of our cultural illiteracy that it doesn't.

Lest it be thought that the attitudes expressed by Professor Scholes and his respondents are unrepresentative of elite opinion in the academy these days, let us turn our attention to the proceedings in New Haven one Saturday early this past May, when Yale's Whitney Humanities Center sponsored a day-long public symposium to examine the subject of "Literary Theory and the Curriculum." That the topic was of more than casual interest was clear from the enthusiastic audience of some three hundred students, teachers (from Yale and elsewhere), and curious outsiders that crowded the Center's modest lecture hall to overflowing. In a notice announcing the symposium, Sheila Murnaghan, assistant director of the Center and associate professor of classics at Yale, explained that "after two decades of intense debate sparked by structuralism, post-structuralism, feminism, Afro-American, and Third World Studies, and a resurgence of Marxism, teachers of literature find themselves in a bewildering situation." The symposium, Professor Murnaghan promised, "will bring together some of the most thoughtful members of the profession to compare notes on the current state of literary study and to assess the possibility of finding a common ground from which to respond to these challenges."

It is difficult to quarrel with the accuracy of Professor Murnaghan's list of "challenges" or her diagnosis of bewilderment. Yet whether what we have witnessed in liter-

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ary studies in the past two decades is properly termed an "intense debate" is itself highly debatable; a more plausible term might be "usurpation," motivated partly by intellectual fashion (structuralism, post-structuralism), partly by politics (feminism and the rest). And looking back on the event, one would also have to quibble with Professor Murnaghan's description of what the majority of those "most thoughtful" members of the profession had to contribute to the discussion: "compare"? "assess"? "respond"? As it happened, "proselytize" was much closer to the truth.

Peter Brooks, who in addition to being the director of the Whitney Humanities Center is the Chester D. Tripp Professor of the Humanities and chairman of the Department of French at Yale, opened the festivities with a few words about the way in which recent literary theory has called into question traditional approaches to literature and "what we do as teachers of literature." Do we, he asked, still have any fixed point of reference or any common ground in the teaching of English? Has anything like a new consensus emerged from "challenges" of the sort that Professor Murnaghan rehearsed? Or have literary studies become caught up in the logic of the "post-, post-, post-; post-structuralist, post-modernist, post-disciplinary"? Without attempting to answer these questions, Professor Brooks did suggest something of a common project when he observed at the end of his remarks that the task he and his colleagues now faced was that of "rewriting" tradition "in a more suspicious manner." Once again, however, one found oneself quibbling over niceties; for while it soon became clear that those "most thoughtful" members of the profession were in wholehearted agreement with Professor Brooks, what one witnessed as the event proceeded were sundry attempts to "rewrite" the tradition in a manner that, far from being simply "suspicious," was blatantly tendentious and ideological.

Though lamenting the loss of consensus in the humanities, the participants that day nonetheless shared a number of important assumptions about what was and wasn't wrong with the academy, the ends of education, and the tasks currently facing literary criticism. A superficial diversity masked a considerable unity of purpose. Taken together, the contributions more or less summarized the range and style of mainstream opinion in the academy on these issues, and so it is worth reviewing the proceedings in some detail.

The symposium was divided into three sessions. The morning session was devoted to "The State of the Curriculum in the Wake of Two Decades of Literary Theory." J. Hillis Miller, for many years professor of English at Yale but recently lured to the University of California at Irvine, and Michael Riffaterre, professor of Comparative Literature at Columbia University, each presented papers that purported to deal with the announced subject. They were followed by Professors Paul Fry of Yale and Barbara Johnson, lately of Yale but now installed at Harvard, who responded to the papers.

Professor Miller's contribution was entitled "From the Theory of Reading to the Example Read." In fact, he explained, what he was presenting was only an excerpt from a much longer essay; I seem to recall him mentioning the figure of ninety-six pages, so apparently the portion he read us only *felt* like ninety-six pages. Professor Miller began by describing the "spectacular proliferation of powerful and incompatible theories" that have swept contemporary literary criticism and have fundamentally changed the way the subject is taught. In his view, perhaps the most important change wrought by these "spectacular" theories is in the relationship between theory and example. Where in traditional literary criticism the "example"—that is, particular works of literature—clearly took precedence over "theory," today the relationship is reversed; now, as Professor Miller cheerfully explained, the example is "arbitrarily chosen." That is to say, it is chosen not for its historical importance, not for its literary value, not for any truth or moral clarity it might be supposed to com-

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municate, but solely for its aptness in illustrating the current pet theory of the critic.

Professor Miller went on to point out that this reversal in the relationship between example and theory has had profound implications for the way in which we read; fortunately, that "we" is still far from universal; but the heralded reversal certainly has had profound implications for the way in which books—or, to use the preferred term, "texts"—are read in the academy. There, as Professor Miller noted, it is widely held that a "resistance to theory is in fact a resistance to reading." This slogan, which Professor Miller took care to repeat two or three times in the course of his presentation, may be said to summarize the burden of his paper. It comes from the late Paul de Man, who, along with Jacques Derrida, was among those chiefly responsible for institutionalizing the tenets of deconstruction in literary studies. By the time he died in 1983, de Man's reputation as a literary theorist was stratospheric: his death catapulted it into orbit. To invoke the authority of Paul de Man is to confer an unimpeachable aura of critical sophistication upon one's words, so naturally he is alluded to continuously in the books and articles—and symposia—of his acolytes.

"The resistance to theory is in fact a resistance to reading"—a prize de Manian specimen, that. And whatever "theory" might mean in this context—it is bad form to indulge in anything so pedestrian as a definition in these intellectual precincts—the rest of Professor Miller's presentation clearly showed that his own resistance to theory is approximately nil. He proceeded to exemplify the triumph of theory over example with a prolix and convoluted meditation on Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story, "The Minister's Black Veil." Among much else, his presentation featured a turgid discussion of the notion of personification, a good deal of solemn talk about "the act of reading," and the enlightening revelation that "the story is the unveiling of the possibility of the impossibility of the unveiling." So much for Hawthorne.

What, it may be asked, does all this have to do with "The State of the Curriculum in the Wake of Two Decades of Literary Theory"? The answer of course is nothing. But unlike many of the participants in the symposium, Professor Miller at least made a gesture toward addressing the announced topic. In outlining what he described as the "practical implications" of his paper, he warned that the rejection of theory is "reactionary or stupid or both" and suggested that universities ought to arrange their curricula in such a way as "to make possible the teaching of reading in its uneasy relation to theory."

Professor Miller didn't specify exactly what he meant by this uneasy relation; but he was clearly concerned that his colleagues were backsliding on their commitment to the priority of theory. Indulging in a gloomy pun, he even wondered if we weren't witnessing the "wake of literary theory" in a sense quite different from that intended by the title of the session. His concern seemed misplaced, it must be said, for, as he also noted, deconstruction—the *ne plus ultra* of "theoretical" approaches to literature—has by now firmly established itself not only in literary studies but throughout the humanities and even in certain social sciences. Nevertheless, he lamented that Yale no longer deserved its reputation as a bastion of advanced theoretical criticism. Now, anyone who is at all familiar with the faculties of the departments of English, French, and Comparative Literature there would find the notion that Yale suffers from a dearth of deconstructionists simply laughable. But who knows: perhaps Professor Miller felt that his own departure deprived the university of its place on the frontiers of advanced thought? In any case, it was his view that if Yale were to recapture its former glory it must not only appoint more senior professors who are sympathetic to the cause of theory—he mentioned several possible candidates—but it must also give tenure to more of their younger disciples—again, he favored us with suggestions of several names. As things stand, Professor Miller

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concluded darkly, it might already be too late to stop what he described as the "Harvardization" of Yale.

We may review the next two installments of this session briefly. Michael Riffaterre's paper, "Relevance of Theory/Theory of Relevance," probably must take the palm for being at once the most pedantic and the most banal presentation of the entire symposium; and this, you understand, was against stiff competition. Professor Riffaterre is obviously someone who delights in his professorial mantle, and he plays the professorial role to the hilt. He treated us to an extraordinary congeries of categories and distinctions, all delivered in a manner and a French-accented English that must have taken years to perfect. "What we must be after is the *je ne sais quoi* that makes literature literary," he intoned, and then proceeded to deduce the six "necessary properties" of "literariness" and apply them to a reading of *Madame Bovary*.

For his part, Paul Fry concentrated on elaborating the theme of the "undecidability of language" that he found expressed in different ways in both Professors Miller and Riffaterre's papers. His delivery was very rapid and often hard to follow, but one caught various fragments, such as his blithe call for an "onto-poetic" theory that would "revise Miller and impose a little specificity on Heidegger" by viewing personification as a "relay station" between being and language. His response was full of pretentious nonsense such as this. But my favorite moments were when he dropped phrases like "from Aristotle to [Jonathan] Culler" and "from Schleiermacher to de Man," as if it were only natural that such illustrious names should be so linked. If nothing else, Professor Fry's response ought to have reassured Professor Miller about the state of the Yale English department.

And indeed, Barbara Johnson's response also made one wonder what Professor Miller had to fear from the "Harvardization" of Yale; for if her views are at all typical of her colleagues', he needn't worry that books will be read as literary documents or that theory will get short shrift in Cambridge. Taking as her epigraph "Theory is quicker," Professor Johnson delivered herself of an exceedingly arch feminist reflection on the morning's presentations. After the usual introductory filigree, she turned to consider Professor Riffaterre's discussion of *Madame Bovary* more closely. That the book deals with adultery was a great boon, of course, because that opened up an unlimited field for pronouncements about the baleful condition of women. Nor was Professor Johnson lax in capitalizing on this wonderful opportunity. Blending a deconstructionist's obsession with language and a feminist's obsession with male dominance, she summed up Professor Riffaterre's paper as a "masterful demonstration" of "the fact" that "gynophobia is structured like a language" and, conversely, that "language is structured like gynophobia." Women themselves conspire in this dread process, she told us, for "the collective linguistic psyche exists in symbiotic relation to the fallen woman."

We also learned, by a similarly elusive logic, that the "literary canon is a defense against its own femininity," a defense "against the woman within." What any of this could possibly mean was never revealed, but no one seemed to mind: it all sounded so exquisitely chic. The assertion that "gynophobia is structured like a language," for example, echoes the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's equally absurd statement that the unconscious is structured like a language; and in this company such a pedigree was warrant enough to present even patent drivel as fact.

The brief question-and-answer period proceeded along more or less the same lines: What, it was asked, is the state of the curriculum in the age of the fallen woman? And so on. But perhaps the most revealing statement came from Professor Miller, who told us that in his view history and literature are "exactly the same thing"—a statement that did not, however, seem to lead anyone to confuse what we might call the historical desire for lunch with a merely literary longing, or prevent the audience from quitting the auditorium directly the session was ended.

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The second session, "The Literary Canon and Anti-Canonical Criticism," unfolded as a more explicitly politicized version of the first. Elaine Showalter of Princeton University and Houston Baker of the University of Pennsylvania each presented papers—Professor Baker's seemed largely *ex tempore*—and Professors Geoffrey Hartman and J. Michael Holquist of Yale responded.

Professor Showalter, widely known and admired in feminist circles, read a paper entitled "The Other Bostonians: Gender and Literary Study." It was, quite simply, a call for "a transformation of the curriculum" that would accept "gender as a fundamental category of literary analysis." Professor Showalter is obviously nothing if not ambitious. She hopes that "literary knowledge itself will be redefined" by the feminist crusade. What she wants is not merely "mainstreaming," not merely the inclusion of many more female authors in the standard college curriculum—though that, certainly, is a prerequisite for the kinds of change she has in mind. She also wants to enshrine the recognition of "sexual difference" as a "crucial element in the way we all read and write." Only thus could she realize the dream of a "female vernacular" out of which "women can name their own experience." And despite multifarious setbacks, which Professor Showalter was careful to enumerate, progress was being made. Already there was daring "new research" under way that promises to result in "new curricular experiments" and "genuine knowledge" of a field. Like what? Well, like the proliferation of current feminist studies of eating disorders that, among other wonderful things, "creates new interest in the binge/purge syndrome" as it relates to Sylvia Plath's development. Yes, we have a lot to look forward to.

Nor can feminism rest content with championing female (one could hardly call it feminine) experience. Male experience must also be scrutinized. Professor Showalter named "the defamiliarization of masculinity" "one of the most important tasks facing feminist criticism in the next decade." If "male experience" has hitherto been understood to be "natural" and "unproblematic," a mode of experience that represents "humanity in general," it must now be exposed as a biased, ideologically laden construction. Men, too—perhaps especially men—must be enlisted in this attempt to "open up the discourse of masculinity." And good news: For those men who have abandoned "the myth of objectivity and transcendence," who have "the courage to become vulnerable" and "realize that they are embodied," this new recognition of masculinity "will be a transformation of volcanic force." "Simply to think about masculinity is to become less masculine oneself," we were assured, and, after all, what could be better than that?

As Professor Showalter enthusiastically proclaimed, her envisioned program implies a "complete revolution" in the teaching of our literary heritage, a revolution that would also establish "gay criticism," "black criticism," "post-colonial criticism," and so on as equal partners in the academy. For if gender is a "crucial element in the way we all read and write," then why not sexual orientation, race, and class—why not any political interest? Presumably, the only criticism that would not be nurtured in this feminist utopia is literary criticism, tainted as it is by an allegiance to the "myth" of disinterested inquiry and a notion of scholarship that deliberately strives to exclude political differences.

Houston Baker's presentation, entitled "The Promised Body," provided us with a further application of the principles at work in Professor Showalter's paper, except that this time the privileged category was race, not gender. Professor Baker began with a bit of ideological throat-clearing, invoking Marx to the effect that the canon is determined to some extent by class interests and reminding us that the past is always an "ideologically conditioned version of events gone by." In the American academy today, he told us, the entire fabric of literary study, including the determination of the literary canon, is the function of a biased reading of the recent and the distant past, especially our own past. In his view, the "most penetrating and

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reverberant" sound in canon formation in the last three decades in the United States is the sound of civil-rights marchers chanting —and here Professor Baker began to chant— "we shall not be moved, we shall not be moved."

This brought Professor Baker to his main point: that the black-power and black-art movements of the Sixties and early Seventies challenged dominant "white Western" cultural values in a uniquely productive and promising way. It was then, he told us, that the black experience "found its way onto the stage of the American academy and the black initiative became a reality for every man, woman, or student, every administrator, professor, resident advisor, security guard, or secretary." It is impossible to reproduce Professor Baker's oratorical stage effects, but be assured that he is an extremely able performer. And he gave us the full repertoire that afternoon. There were quotations from Washington and Jefferson meant to portray them as racists, charges that the Constitution of the United States is a racist document (a "Gothic romance," as Professor Baker memorably put it), readings from the writings of former slaves to show what terrific literature we've missed, and abundant references to what Professor Baker referred to as "the African diaspora."

Though delivered with unusual pathos, all this was in fact the most predictable fare imaginable. But Professor Baker concluded with a twist that was new to me, comparing the black experience in this country to the Roman Catholic Mass. Central to both, he told us, is the notion of a sacrifice and also the "materialization and engorgement of the body as a manifested covenant of a new order." He also liked to describe black Americans as "the African Body," noting, among much else, that the African Body and its history contain an alternative story of the founding of the United States and that "the African Body emerges as a canonical announcement of a promised or covenanted body." It need hardly be said that the audience was spellbound by Professor Baker's performance, especially by his concluding litany of recent outbreaks of violence and racial prejudice against "the African Body" on several campuses around the country; it has become rare in these quiet days in the academy that your average white, middle-class audience can indulge in such ecstasies of intellectualized liberal shame.

Of course, presentations like those of Professors Showalter and Baker put any respondent at a tremendous rhetorical disadvantage. Anything resembling dissent risked being excoriated as a sexist or racist attack on the voices of freedom. This Professor Holquist must have realized, for when it came time for him to respond he contented himself with a few apologetic mumblings about how "political considerations" had kept black studies from becoming institutionalized as successfully as gender studies. But Professor Hartman did venture a few tentative criticisms. Noting that both presentations exhibited a strong utopian element, he began by remarking the high pitch of his colleagues' rhetoric; he even made bold to ask whether their rhetoric wasn't sometimes "stronger than their concepts." The end they envisioned was "generous," he hastily added; but he had to admit that on the "conceptual level" he was "perplexed, even disconcerted."

Though he would seem to have long since given up serious criticism for modish intellectual esoterica, Professor Hartman's remarks reminded one that he has done lasting, even brilliant, work; and one was reminded, too, that he was without doubt the most distinguished scholar to participate in the symposium. What worried him was that the essentially political programs outlined by his colleagues would compromise the freedom and independence of the university, jeopardizing disinterested scholarship. Recognizing that the university is in many respects a place apart, he gently urged caution lest overt political imperatives be allowed to determine the character of university life. What he seems to have underestimated, alas, was the extent to which the political infiltration of intellectual life was the frankly acknowledged goal of his more radical colleagues.

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Although it began quietly, the third session, "The Institution of Criticism: What Should We Be Teaching, and Teaching Future Teachers to Teach?" ended by showing just how frankly acknowledged such political imperatives could be. Gerald Graff of Northwestern University and Margaret Ferguson of Columbia University were the session's main speakers; Neil Hertz of Johns Hopkins University and Peter Brooks responded.

Professor Graff's presentation, "What Should We Be Teaching When There's No 'We'?" was by far the most practical paper in the symposium. Whatever one thought of his ideas, it was clear that he had devoted some considerable time to thinking about everyday pedagogical problems. In his view, the basic problem was that though the "we" of the academy is far more inclusive now than it used to be, there is no agreement on first principles and hence no consensus about what should be taught, or how. His solution was simply to dispense with the ideal of consensus and adopt a model of conflict. We don't need a consensus, he told us, to carry on work in the academy; we can agree to disagree.

In some respects, Professor Graff's proposals were reminiscent of the teachings of John Dewey; he thus assured us that the content of what is read "hardly matters"; what matters is the way it feeds into students' experience. Turning to some practical applications of this insight, he suggested that one might experiment with "teacher swapping" (not to be confused with team teaching), an innovation in which one teacher teaches a course for, say, five weeks, after which another comes in and begins by asking what the first teacher said, probing his presuppositions and prejudices. In fact, this is a prescription for confusion, guaranteed to muddle young minds. But the real problem with Professor Graff's vision—as with the progressive ideas from which it derives—is that it purchases "pluralistic" concord at the price of intellectual content. If it "hardly matters" what students read, it will "hardly matter" what they know or believe.

There was none of this spirit of accommodation in Margaret Ferguson's paper, "Teaching and/as Reproduction." Though delivered in measured, even demure, tones, it was easily the most radical presentation of the symposium. Her thesis was that in liberal bourgeois society teaching must be seen primarily as a means by which the ruling class perpetuates or "reproduces" inequitable class relations. In one sense, certainly, Professor Ferguson is quite right that schools are "sites for social reproduction." That is a main reason civilized cultures have always put such stock by education. The problem today, however, is not that our schools "reproduce" the culture and values that support them, but that they are doing the job so poorly.

Yet to hear Professor Ferguson tell it, things are bad indeed in the particular capitalist bourgeois society that she has the misfortune to inhabit and work in. Thus she began by questioning the appropriateness of the word "should" in the title of the session: given the enormous constraints that the university supposedly places on "thought and action," what sense does it make to ask what we *should* be teaching when the question of what we *can* be teaching is so pressing? And isn't it problematic, she asked her colleagues, to see ourselves primarily as critics or teachers and only secondarily, if at all, as state functionaries or employees of a major corporation?

But think about it. What is so compromising about being an employee of the state or a corporation, even a "major corporation"? At what point did Leftist attitudes so infiltrate everyday language that working for the Post Office or General Foods, let alone a "major corporation" like Columbia University, should *ipso facto* seem to carry with it a moral taint? Are we to believe that the citizens of a socialist country are spiritually or physically freer from state control than their counterparts in Western democracies? And what dire constraints does Professor Ferguson imagine the university imposes upon the "thought and action" of its employees? She herself appeared remarkably unconstrained that afternoon.

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That Professor Ferguson's paper should be littered with such contradictions should not surprise us. They represent the standard operating equipment of intellectual Marxists, who are always ready to trump mere empirical evidence with the charge of "false consciousness" or bad faith—reserving to themselves the determination of what is to count as genuine insight and authenticity. It was only to be expected that Professor Ferguson should describe "capitalist social relations" as "monolithic" and then, by virtue of her criticism, arrogate to herself a place outside that allegedly monolithic totality; and it was simply business as usual that she should rail against the liberal tradition and its ideal of "pluralist accommodation," even though it was only in a society governed precisely by that spirit of "pluralist accommodation" that criticism of the sort she propounded would be tolerated.

But in order to get the full flavor of Professor Ferguson's *Weltanschauung,* let us consider for a moment the book that provided her with the inspiration and title for her paper, *Reproduction in Education and Society,* by the French Marxist sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron. A work of aggressive impenetrability, *Reproduction in Education and Society* advances the thesis that education in bourgeois societies has the "social function of reproducing the class relations, by ensuring the hereditary transmission of cultural capital." The book consists of a series of highly contentious propositions about social life and education dressed up and elaborated in the abstract, pedantic argot favored by certain academic Marxists. Near the beginning of the book, for example, Messrs. Bourdieu and Passeron inform us that *"All* ***pedagogic action*** (PA) *is, objectively, symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power."* Their use of the term "objectively" here is a touch especially worth savoring. And later on, they confide that the corrupted ethos of the bourgeoisie reveals itself in its very language. Hence they distinguish between "bourgeois language," which is said to tend to "abstraction, formalism, intellectualism and euphemistic moderation"—evil things, all—and "working-class language,"

> which manifests itself in the tendency to move from particular case to particular case, from illustration to parable, or to shun the bombast of fine words and the turgidity of grand emotions, through banter, rudeness and ribaldry, manners of being and doing characteristic of classes who are never fully given the social conditions for the severance between objective denotation and subjective connotation, . . .[5]

All this is the sheerest quackery, of course, though it does inspire the droll question whether its authors believe they have achieved anything like the stylistic frankness they admire in "working-class language."

Like her mentors, Professor Ferguson displayed a thoroughgoing animus toward the Western democratic tradition. Invoking the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, she castigated the "ideology" of free will propagated by Western bourgeois societies. And on a lighter note, she indulged in ridiculing the authors of an article that appeared in *Commentary* for suggesting that traditional liberal academics attempted "to promote intellectual openness and tolerance through an honest reading of the West's achievements."[6] Naturally, this provoked considerable mirth in the audience, for who still believes in either the West's achievements or its honesty?

After Professor Ferguson's performance, the responses could hardly help seeming anticlimactic. Neil Hertz maundered on about education as a process of "unmasking" and the desirability of opening up the university "to as many modes of self-drama-

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5 *Reproduction in Education and Society*, by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, translated by Richard Nice, with a foreword by Tom Bottomore; SAGE Studies in Social and Educational Change, Volume 5, SAGE Publications, 1977, *seriatim*, pp. 199, 5, 116.

6 "The Tenured Left," by Stephen H. Balch and Herbert I. London, *Commentary*, October, 1986, p. 50.

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tization as possible," while Peter Brooks took the occasion to pillory Secretary Bennett for his "reactionary" and "sclerotic" views about education. Reflecting on the title of the session, Professor Brooks noted that he understood "us" to mean "we who are not nostalgic for the old consensus." Even the formal proceedings of the symposium, with its round of speakers didactically addressing an audience from a podium, was too formal and "too canonical" for his taste. Perhaps he would have preferred a series of spontaneous improvisations?

The discussion that followed, however, proved quite lively. Two exchanges in particular seem worth remarking. In one of the symposium's rare moments of dissension, Professor Graff rose to challenge Professor Ferguson's presentation. Though he assured the audience that he considered himself "on the Left," he nevertheless felt that Professor Ferguson had given a distorted picture of the situation in the American academy. Compared to what, he asked, may we complain that our universities are sites of "ideological reproduction"? Ah, yes: "Compared to what?" The question marked the day's single great burst of common sense. Where else, Professor Graff asked, would one find the ideas of Marx, Foucault, Althusser, and Professor Ferguson's other heroes taken seriously except in the university? Where else would her presentation not only be encouraged but actually listened to and (one assumes) paid for?

Obviously infuriated by her colleague's impertinence, Professor Ferguson responded but did not really reply to these questions. Instead, she pointed out that success in the university, especially for women and minorities, comes at a tremendous psychic cost. She confided that she herself had had to internalize a code of decorum and manners to succeed in the academy; almost sadly, she assured the audience that she was not going to stand up and swear at us—or at Professor Graff—much as she might want to at the moment; part of the price of being there on the podium was being trained not to do such things. And in case we didn't get it the first time around, she reminded us that she regarded the real problems in the academy as political problems: questions about the canon or pedagogy or education in general were merely fronts for political issues. Not surprisingly, Professor Ferguson's confession was greeted by a loud round of applause.

Professor Graff replied by asking Professor Ferguson what she proposed to do with the many people in the academy who happened not to agree with her. No-one, he observed, had addressed himself to that rather elementary question. Nor was anyone going to. Sensing that the moment was ripe, Professor Baker intervened from his place in the audience to charge that Professor Hartman's contribution to the symposium had been a "conservative, possibly racist response." Moreover, he declaimed, Professor Hartman had indulged in "an extraordinary valorization of the university," implying as he did that the life of the mind was a delicate thing that the university ought to take care to protect from the crass exigencies of society at large. This, too, got a rousing round of applause from an audience apparently disgusted with the whole idea of "valorizing the university," even if they were only too happy to inhabit its protected purlieus. And poor Professor Hartman: "Conservative"! "Racist"! One wondered which epithet stung worse. He made some effort to respond, but it soon became clear that nothing as feckless as a reasoned reply could influence the course of opinion in a room so charged with overheated rhetoric.

Like most of the reflections in the *Salmagundi* colloquy, the symposium at Yale underscored the predominance in the academy of what the literary critic Frederick Crews has aptly dubbed "Left Eclecticism." As Professor Crews explains, Left Eclecticism is not identical with Marxism *simpliciter,* but represents any of a wide variety of anti-establishment modes of thought from structuralism and post-structuralism, deconstruction, and Lacanian analysis to feminist, homosexual, black, and other patently political

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forms of "criticism." But at the heart of Left Eclecticism is

> an understanding, ultimately borrowed from the Marxist ethos, that analytic and theoretic discourse is to be judged primarily by the evident radicalism of its stance. The schools of thought thus favored make sharply divergent claims, yet all of them set themselves against allegedly repressive Western institutions and practices. In dealing with a given painting, novel, or piece of architecture, especially one dating from the capitalist era, they do not aim primarily to show the work's character or governing idea. The goal is rather to subdue the work through aggressive demystification—for example, by positing its socioeconomic determinants and ideological implications, scanning it for any encouraging signs of subversion, and then judging the result against an ideal of total freedom.[7]

I think most would agree that, taken together, the *Salmagundi* collection and the Yale symposium offer a compelling illustration of the kind of thing Professor Crews has in mind.

What is particularly depressing about such spectacles is the thought that, far from being atypical, they represent the dominant current of opinion in our most prestigious institutions of higher education. Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Johns Hopkins, Columbia, Brown—the company is nothing if not renowned. That these men and women should be so blithely prepared to jettison the tradition and intellectual principles that have nourished and given meaning to their disciplines is indeed a sobering thought—as is the realization that these same men and women hold positions of considerable power and influence in the colleges and universities that are charged with educating our young. Their cynicism, devotion to shallow intellectual fashion, and unthinking acceptance of radical politics make it easy to wonder, with Allan Bloom, whether "there is either the wherewithal or the energy within the university to constitute or reconstitute the idea of an educated human being and establish a liberal education again." There is little support for optimism.

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7 "Dialectical Immaterialism," reprinted from the Autumn, 1985 issue of *The American Scholar* in Professor Crews's recent collection of essays, *Skeptical Engagements* (Oxford University Press, 1986).

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Mondrian in theory and practice

by K. S. Champa

The accomplishments of the Dutch painter Piet Mondrian and his associates in the De Stijl group seem to be endlessly fascinating, if one can make this judgment on the basis of the sheer quantity of ambitious publication over the past decade. Why this is so appears, however, to be somewhat puzzling when seen against the broad-based rejection of "radical" modernism in this same decade —the period of so-called postmodernism. Is it nostalgia (a *very* postmodern sentiment) that has bred a renewed fascination with postmodernism's ideologically more sure-footed predecessor, or is it a niggling fear that something more aesthetically durable has been lost sight of? Or is it just old-fashioned pedantry gravitating toward Mondrian and De Stijl because there is so much theory, so many documents to edit and analyze? Supporting the last of these three possibilities is the clear fact that Mondrian and De Stijl are almost unique among major twentieth-century aesthetic phenomena in that they can be studied (if one chooses to do so) almost exclusively from the written record of autograph texts. The paintings, architectural projects, etc. which constitute the visual legacy of the artists involved lend themselves almost perfectly to functioning as examples of what is being brought forward in print—usually, but not always, in the pages of the periodical called *De Stijl,* conceived in 1917 and edited by its founder, Theo van Doesburg, until his death in 1931.

The personal archives of major members of the De Stijl circle—of van Doesburg in particular—have made possible much precise filling-in of the documentary record. This process of "infill" is the guiding purpose behind *De Stijl: The Formative Years,* produced for a Dutch-language original in 1982 and published last year in an English translation.[1] The scholars who contributed to this volume, many of whom are quite young, aim at precisely the sort of "deconstruction" of established opinion that always seems to accompany what is arguably too much documentation. Suddenly pluralism—meaning here the clear identity of individual participants in an historical moment—is pressed into high relief. The consensus which one perceived in the external events of the De Stijl movement transmutes into a near absolute diversity of ideology and personal action when one views the movement internally through more or less private documents. As Carel Blotkamp asserts in the introduction to *De Stijl: The Formative Years*: ". . . the existing image of De Stijl as a collective, with a clear-cut artistic program stricter than that of any other avant-garde movement in the twentieth century, needs some correction." The book is a generally useful, if critically colorless and timid, compendium of such corrections—corrections

1 *De Stijl: The Formative Years,* by Carel Blotkamp, et alia; translated by Charlotte I. Loeb and Arthur L. Loeb; MIT Press, 292 pages, $45.

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which, however, make sense only to readers equipped in advance with the knowledge of what is being corrected.

For it to have any real intellectual impact, *De Stijl: The Formative Years* has to be read in tandem with the long overdue re-publication of H. L. C. Jaffé's book, *De Stijl: 1917-1931,* a monumental history of the movement which first appeared in the mid-1950s with the revealing subtitle *The Dutch Contribution to Modern Art.*[2] Even after thirty years, Jaffé's book remains among the best histories of a single movement in modern art—and it is a history which is in no sense compromised by "deconstruction." Like more recent studies, Jaffé's book is an exercise in cultural history operating from a persistent documentary base. Unconcerned with aesthetic analysis, except through an exegesis of history, Jaffé has enough documentation at hand to develop a still compelling argument for the unifying "Dutchness" of De Stijl activity. It is evident from the first pages of the book that "Dutchness," as first defined and elaborated by Johan Huizinga, establishes for Jaffé what would nowadays be called the "deep structure" of De Stijl.

The supporting evidence that Jaffé offers for his notion of "Dutchness" is as formidable as it is often critically ingenious. Whether emphasizing van Doesburg or Mondrian, he is remarkably successful in accounting for the character of their activities with a series of socio-psychological constants which in combination reduce themselves to the "Nederlands geestesmerk." In a neo-Tainian performance of the most intellectually authentic sort, Jaffé manages to convince his readers that, whether or not the index of "Dutchness" holds up in all known and yet-to-be-known details, it nevertheless represents a truth which greater *correctness* of documentation will never totally subvert or even substantially alter. This is because the source of this particular idea of "Dutchness" is the intelligent instinct of a thoroughly trained historian with a very special and very personal feeling for the material about which he writes.

One senses, under the surface of Jaffé's documentary text, echoes of several generations of good, juicy Dutch modernist hearsay. This hearsay apparently informed his view and enforced his critical bias as he set down his evidence in the order it finally assumed in *De Stijl: 1917-1931.* For contemporary readers who lack an ear for these echoes, many of Jaffé's particular maneuvers in the direction of Calvinism and the mysticism of Dr. Shoenmaekers may seem arbitrary and overdrawn. But what must be kept in mind is that Jaffé's having made these maneuvers—in his role as first historian of the De Stijl movement—comes to constitute an important part of that movement's documentary and theoretical history. Jaffé's processing of De Stijl documentation is, in other words, an original document in itself—not of the overly incidental sort represented by autograph documents, but of a reflective sort that shows the density and richness of a second-generation insider looking back at his ideological roots. It is a considerable privilege to have Jaffé's book back in circulation. *De Stijl: 1917-1931* continues to insist on the high level of intellectual seriousness and passion that uniquely marks the published bibliography of De Stijl generally and particularly of its own master artist, Piet Mondrian—the "purified" respelling of whose name (by the artist himself in Paris in the 1920s) Jaffé refuses to accept for his book. Understandably, Jaffé seems to have felt that the denationalized and consciously internationalized "Mondrian" would be inappropriate for his study. "Dutchness" required that the spelling remain "Mondriaan" from beginning to end.

Published simultaneously with the Jaffé reprint is *The New Art—The New Life,* the equally long awaited edition of Mondrian's collected writings, edited and translated by Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James.[3] This

2 *De Stijl: 1917-1931,* by H. L. C. Jaffé; Harvard University Press, 352 pages, $14.95.

3 *The New Art—The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian,* edited and translated by Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James; G. K. Hall, 472 pages, $60.

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book, which brings together virtually the entire range of Mondrian's finished writings (along with random notes presumably for other writing ventures left incomplete at the time of the artist's death in 1944), is an indispensable resource for tracking the sequential path of Mondrian's theory of art, the arts, modern life, society, etc. It is well presented, too, with clear introductory prefaces for the major essays and a general consistency in the translation of key terms—a consistency which has often been lacking in the prior, piecemeal publication of Mondrian's better-known writings. Except for the expense wasted on numerous black-and-white illustrations of Mondrian's paintings —an extravagance not at all suitable to the general focus of Mondrian's discussion of his own art—everything about the book seems intelligently planned and executed.

The argument for an English translation of Mondrian's writings is hard to fault, since it makes those writings accessible to such a large audience. Nevertheless, for serious scholarly reference, *The New Art—The New Life* would have been markedly improved by the addition of complementary original-language (mostly Dutch and French) texts. Only by going back to the original language can one be certain (or at least relatively certain) of what given words meant for Mondrian. Although multilingual, Mondrian seems always to have thought outward from his native Dutch—a fact which is evident in the use of many Dutch terms in his previously unpublished notes from London and New York. Ultimately, one suspects, everything becomes too smooth rhetorically by the presentation of Mondrian's theoretical writing in one language, unless (unfortunately, for most of us) that language is Dutch.

Missing as well from the Holtzman and James edition are the considerable number of Mondrian letters that have come to light in recent years. Some of these letters are quoted in the introductory essays sprinkled through the book, but apart from this there is no sense of their informative range. An edition of the letters is said to be in the process of being assembled, and once it appears the Mondrian autograph will be, at least quantitatively, more or less complete.

At this point, however, it is appropriate to insert the question: So what? Does anybody besides the specialist scholar really need to have available in collected form the whole autograph of a writer as essentially constant, and even repetitious, as Mondrian? Further, does one need to puzzle over the abstruse language of discourse when Jaffé has provided such a wide-ranging summary and analysis of Mondrian's theory? Obviously, it would be intellectually irresponsible to suggest that *any* systematic assembly of historically important material is useless. Yet a better argument could be made for the marginal utility of Mondrian's writings than for those of any comparable historical personality.

To read through the Holtzman and James volume is to be struck again and again by the accuracy of Jaffé's characterization of Mondrian's theoretical writings. "His series of essays," Jaffé writes, "from his first articles in *De Stijl* to his final publications in 1942, are a continuous repetition and elaboration of one idea, applied to the most divergent currents of human activity, but all starting from one aprioristic point and developing to still greater perfection . . . ." The only thing necessary to add to this is how reactive Mondrian was to the changing art-political situations in which he wrote. Although his message is constant, his tone and emphasis change from initial revelatory confidence in 1917-19, to established authority in the early 1920s, to defensiveness thereafter, as abstract art confronted the aesthetic rearguard action of various forms of revived realism and Surrealism. Around 1920 Mondrian had the theoretical field in abstract art virtually to himself, but the uncontested authority of the De Stijl position rapidly withered from forces both inside and outside the movement. It is Mondrian's persistently messianic holding pattern that is displayed most clearly in nearly all his writing after 1922. His increasingly absolutist and dogmatic theoretical formulations develop

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as he experiences immense ideological counter-pressure, first from van Doesburg, then from virtually every imaginable direction.

Yet, rather like a saint undergoing the trials of his faith, Mondrian remained unshakable theoretically through everything, and, even more important, his painting thrived qualitatively more steadily than that of any artist in the first half of the twentieth century. This last fact, the utter dependability of Mondrian's artistry—which is far more metamorphic than his theory—requires that the theory's relationship to the artistry be re-examined from the artist's starting point of 1917.

Mondrian undertook to write art theory at that time, not because of a driving interest in theory *per se* but rather because of a series of revelations that had manifested themselves in his painting. As they did so, these revelations began to resonate sympathetically with the work of other proto-De Stijl artists. Explanation and celebration combined into the excited ambition *and* the felt obligation to write theory. Feeling as he did that the new Dutch work called "neoplasticism" marked an epochal forward mutation in the evolution of modern art (and modern sensibility), Mondrian assumed the role of chief priest and spokesman of what he saw as advanced modernism. In doing so he attempted to shift the focus of art-theoretical discourse away from the uncertain and highly subjective premises of prewar Kandinsky and Marinetti toward clear, abstract universal premises—as clear and abstract as the conditions of his own painting had become.

In the period between 1917 and 1920, Mondrian produced both of his most revealing theoretical works for the periodical *De Stijl*—the first a quasi-philosophical essay, generally dialectical in form, entitled "The New Plastic in Painting," and the second a trialogue, "Natural Reality and Abstract Reality." Taken together, the two pieces constitute an essentially fixed doctrine. In one, the doctrine is presented through successively developed but interconnected axioms; in the other, through a question-and-answer (or statement-versus-counterstatement) structure. Presumably, Mondrian hoped that the trialogue would operate as a sort of dramatized explication (somewhat more leisurely in its ideological pace) of the intellectual denseness that characterizes the first essay. Appropriately, the trialogue is simple in its exposition and generous in its use of example and metaphor.

In the first essay Mondrian offered a straightforward description of his intentions as a writer of theory: "Although the new plastic in painting reveals itself only through the *actual* work—needs no *explanation* in words—nevertheless much concerning the new plastic can be expressed directly in words and clarified by reasoning . . . . [T]he layman is justified in asking for an immediate explanation of the new art, and it is logical for the artist, *after creating* the new art to try to become conscious of it . . . . Having become conscious of the newly discovered laws of growth, he has no choice but to defend their lawfulness . . . . that is why the contemporary artist gives explanation *about* his work not *of* it."

What Mondrian was stressing in this formulation was the after-the-fact nature of theory, its rationalizing character—something necessary more for audience preparation than anything else. Because of the extreme reduction and limitation of his pictorial means (right-angled lines and flat rectangular planes of color), Mondrian was particularly concerned that his new work be seen as painting containing expression and not just as meaningless geometrical decoration. He seemed to want to defend his art—in his first art-theoretical formulations and every minor variation thereafter—against the aesthetic version of the "emperor's new clothes" syndrome.

The Platonic opposition of particulars and universals is the founding notion of Mondrian's theory. Through various dialectical maneuverings he eventually postulates that the "universal" character of his form language is uniquely equipped to express the universals of purely intuitive and nonsubjective feeling. Additionally, Mondrian

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locates his dynamic of expression in the operation of aesthetically balanced inequalities. The primal natural inequality of male and female transmutes in Neo-Plastic painting into the perpendicular intersection of lines (never to meet) and into the dialogue of line and plane. The whole operation then becomes an absolute model of the modern, the true, and the free. Social utopia models proceed easily from this ideological base as "art for art's sake" and "art for social betterment" become one and the same. The thought of Hegel and Darwin, combined with Theosophy, stand as complementary re-enforcements to a theoretical discourse which is almost maniacally certain of its direction and sublimely immune to any psychological, sociological, aesthetic, or philosophical uncertainty. Ultimately, it is no wonder there is no essential change in Mondrian's theory. To modify a single axiom would be to bring the whole construct crashing to the ground.

Self-confidence was, however, Mondrian's singular strength, and it was ultimately derived from his prideful certainty as a painter. This certainty is so great that Mondrian manages almost without effort to reject music as the paradigm of art generally and of abstract art in particular. This is something that no previous modernist theorist had attempted or even considered. For nearly a century music had served to justify painting's increasing willfulness and abstractness. For Mondrian the justification was no longer necessary, since painting (particularly *his* painting) had first absorbed and then deployed the "modern" in terms absolutely particular to itself. Now, according to Mondrian, music would have to look to painting for guidance, as would every other activity of human life.

For all the universality or modernity that nominally marks Mondrian's theoretical discourse, its "real" content seems, from the vantage point of seventy years, remarkably personal, idiosyncratic, even romantic. As such it evokes in us (as does his art) respect and nostalgia in equal measure. No wonder we still have so much difficulty in sorting out what in Mondrian's work (and in that of De Stijl) was individual and what was collective in essence. All we know with any certainty is that the shoe which was intended to fit every foot ultimately had its origin in the fitting of a very particular single foot.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion:*

V. S. Naipaul *by Joseph Epstein*
The sculpture of John Chamberlain *by William C. Agee*
Ned Rorem's "Nantucket Diary" *by Samuel Lipman*
Kenneth Lynn's "Hemingway" *by James W. Tuttleton*
The architecture of Frank Gehry *by Diana Ketcham*
The Bolshoi in New York *by Eva Resnikova*
Ann Beattie's "Alex Katz" *by Eric Gibson*
On "The Confinement of Free Verse" *by Louis Simpson, with a reply from Brad Leithauser*
New poems *by Peter Davison, Eric Pankey, and G. S. Sharat Chandra*

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New poems *by Elizabeth Spires & Michael J. Rosen*

The beds

(London)

Each day, I take the lift from the sublet down to the ground floor.
Out on the street, I pass the shop that sells the beds,
the sumptuous beds, made up each morning anew, afresh,
by smiling clerks who please their own moods,
doing the beds up one day in flaming sunrise and sunset tones,
and the next, in shades of white on white, with satin piping,
pillowcases threaded with ribbons and bows,
like a bride's too-delicate underclothes.
And yet, nobody sleeps in the beds, makes love in the beds.
They wait, like a young girl with too much imagination,
to be taken away for a weekend in the country,
to a great house where stylish lovers flirt and scheme
in preliminary maneuvering, but know, in the end,
what beds are for. Know, no matter what they do,
all will be plumped and tucked and smoothed,
all made as it was, by knowing maids the morning after.

The anxious clerks stare out at the soiled street,
the racing cars and taxis, the passers-by, waiting for money
to stop, walk in the door, and ask to buy a bed.
There are circles under their eyes,
as if they've been sleeping badly.

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Beds must make way for other beds,
pillows for other pillows, new sheets, new lives!
The seconds tick on the big clock
a block from the bed shop, the minute hand
moves with a jerk, and suddenly whole hours have flown, the day vanishes,
pulled by an unseen hand through a small hole in the sky
somewhere in the darkening East End.
Night falls so quickly on this street of Dream Merchandise!
Now all of us reverse ourselves and change direction
to come home to well-intentioned stews with husbands and wives,
yesterday's leftovers made to stretch so economically,
my heels on the sidewalk clicking in silver tones,
like the small change in my pocket falling end over end over end,
all that remains of a day's hard buying.
Already the new moon is backlighting the city's towers and spires,
illuminating shadowy shop windows up and down Fulham Road.
It drapes itself casually across the beds,
like the misplaced towel or bathrobe
of a woman who has just stepped out for the evening,
wearing new evening clothes, made up so carefully
she can't be recognized, who secretly knows
she will not be coming back until morning
to sleep, if she sleeps then,
in the perfect bed of her own making.

—*Elizabeth Spires*

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In Rousseau's jungles

In retrospect, what should we make of
the labored-over faces, features
which appeared to fit (like pieces
from childhood's idyllic puzzles),

or predators benignly traced
from the encyclopedia plates,
who crop up in the succession
of houseplants that furnish your tropics?

Favorite leaves would germinate
whole species of unforeseeable
symmetry—memory will do that,
sentimental, unforgiving

medium. Their fronds and leaflets turn,
not toward the sun—that ripest orange
which blazes yet won't light up a thing—
but toward us onlookers.

And what of the domestic pets
figuring too largely or too little?
Where do water lilies grow well
with cacti; Indians—New World!—wrestle apes?

(You wrestled with that black shape
yourself.) What was too hard to recall—
how things customarily recede
(roads, rivers, a distant vista),

how things are logically grounded
(roots, foreshortened feet), you skirted
by growing grasses, lengthening hems,
elaborating on the better-known.

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So badly outnumbered by the flora,
that vaguely feline menace clamped
on its vaguely cervine meal, is less
threatening than boughs of boa constrictors,

burgeoning banana chandeliers,
strategically positioned spikes.
Though grass sabers and fences of reed
prevent any thought of escape,

we are, to be perfectly candid,
elsewhere, posing our private fears.
Could the cultivated really
overtake us? We're on- and off-

lookers, not unlike you,
rendering our own habitat
with only memory's thoughtful fumblings
to dictate what goes well with what,

and who, overwhelmingly reduced
to a figurine in the foreground,
should keep a place in the under-
story from being overgrown?

—*Michael J. Rosen*

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Dance

Dutch treat

by Eva Resnikova

The Netherlands Dance Theater—seen in New York for the first time since 1982 during a week-long engagement at the Metropolitan Opera House in June—is a peculiarly European phenomenon. Though Jiri Kylián, its Czech-born artistic director, is not quite so naïvely pretentious as Maurice Béjart (who no longer even attempts to perform in New York), he shares with the high priest of Eurotrash an unabashed reliance on extra-choreographical elements as inspiration for his dances and a concomitant propensity toward copious, earnest, and vague program notes of dubious syntax and punctuation. (Vide the following, from Kylián's apologia for *Heart's Labyrinth*: "The limitless range of human feelings, in their fine nuances and their infinite combinations, create the inexplicable labyrinth of the heart with its endless corridors. Through these corridors I somehow want to get closer to questions, to which I know there are no answers.") Yet Kylián also revealed on this visit a hitherto unsuspected talent for the staging of narrative works, in his productions of Ravel's *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* and Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du soldat.*

The Netherlanders, we are informed in the *Stagebill,* are "trained daily in classical technique and equally at home on pointe or barefoot"; but no evidence of classical training was offered on the stage of the Met, and the only pointe work was from a spindly-legged Louis XV side chair in *L'Enfant et les sortilèges.* In fact, the unbroken flow of movement that is the most salient feature of Kylián's style is aggressively anti-classical. His "fifth position"—the home base of equilibrium toward which the ballet dancer continually strives—is a second-position squat that, like all pliés, inherently contains the implication of ensuing movement. The limitations of his vocabulary became evident during the two Met programs of unrelieved Kyliána, which also included *Silent Cries,* to Debussy's *L'Après-midi d'un faune*; *Six Dances,* to Mozart's *Six German Dances* (K. 571); *Stamping Ground,* to silence and Carlos Chávez's *Toccata for Percussion Instruments*; *Heart's Labyrinth,* to Schoenberg, Webern, and Dvorák; and Stravinsky's *Svadebka* (*Les Noces*).

Balanchine once remarked mischievously that those who were "bored" by ballet could come to the State Theater and just listen, and they would hear "a marvelous concert of music nobody else is playing." Kylián's choice of scores is also of unusual interest; but the triteness of his response often tempts even those of us who love the dance to avert our eyes from the stage. His principal weakness is rhythmical. The typical Kylián dance phrase is built on an undifferentiated legato punctuated by sudden jabs and thrusts that correspond not to the music's rhythmic impulse but to its points of dynamic, or even melodic, intensity, creating an unfortunate "Mickey Mouse" effect. And, much as one enjoys the concert, there is something disturbing about the choreog-

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rapher's appropriation of complex and questionably suitable scores to serve as stepping-stones for his highly personal musings on Life, Death, and similar Big Questions. A disturbing odor of exploitation surrounds the whole enterprise.

Stravinsky, discussing the shortcomings of music critics, identified this "investing of the musical object with the listener's subjective responses" as "a form of the pathetic fallacy." Kylián is by no means alone as a choreographer in succumbing to this error, but at least he's ingenuously sincere. His dances—not to mention his program notes—may make you raise your eyes heavenward and mutter, "*Ach,* these *Mitteleuropäische* expressionists!," but they don't make you enraged. In this respect Kylián differs from the more deviously sophisticated Jerome Robbins, whose response to music is the same but who then compounds his error by going out of his way to deny it. Robbins's 1985 *In Memory of . . .* (set to a score by the third member of the Second Viennese School triumvirate, Alban Berg), with its teaser of a title, seemed to most observers at its unveiling two years ago obviously to implicate the late George Balanchine, not least in its exploitation of both the persona and the inimitable technique of Balanchine's muse, Suzanne Farrell. This led Robbins to insist, in a rare interview granted for the work's "Dance in America" broadcast on PBS, that his ballet is about loss and grief in general and "should not be connected to one person." (One can't help remembering another infamous Robbins demurral, about there being "no plots and no roles" in *Dances at a Gathering.*) Kylián is unabashedly up-front about his inspiration for *Heart's Labyrinth*: the suicide of a recently retired dancer in his company. If Robbins's essay on personal grief is of greater interest, it is only because the language of the classical dance is inherently more complex than Kylián's, and because Suzanne Farrell—who, it should be remembered, spent several years with Béjart—fascinates no matter how unworthy the vehicle.

The comparison of Kylián to Robbins is apt in another, more positive respect. However one feels about Robbins as a classical choreographer, few would deny his brilliance as a stager of Broadway musicals. It is the musical theater's loss and ours that he has abandoned both Broadway and programmatic ballets like his 1944 *Fancy Free* in favor of the more "prestigious" abstract ballet, for the greater the number of limitations within which Robbins is forced to work, the more his artistry and imagination seem to blossom. The same appears to be true of Kylián, whose productions of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* and, to a lesser extent, *L'Histoire du soldat* were often charming, intelligent, and imaginative. In neither case did he adhere slavishly to the stage directions. For one thing, these chamber works had to be enlarged to opera-house dimensions—a task that Kylián accomplished without sacrificing either work's essential sense of intimacy. Where Kylián did depart from the librettists' explicit instructions it was usually to pursue flights of fancy that grew organically out of the plot, adding clever twists to the proceedings without violating the work's integrity.

Both *L'Histoire* and *L'Enfant* are morality tales leavened with humor, but their outcomes and atmospheres differ dramatically, no doubt reflecting the times in which each was created: the former in a war-weary 1918, the latter in the heady mid-Twenties. Both also reveal their composers' infatuation with contemporary American pop music: Stravinsky wrote a ragtime into *L'Histoire* (though his knowledge of this form was derived solely from sheet music); and Ravel, who later told his pupil and biographer Roland-Manuel that he had sought to treat Colette's libretto in the spirit of "*l'opérette américaine,*" included a fox-trot for the Teapot (black, of course) and China Cup.

The impetus for *L'Histoire du soldat* was more economic than artistic. Stravinsky, stranded in Switzerland by the war and, in his own characteristic words, "in a position of the utmost pecuniary difficulty," conceived the idea of collaborating with his

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friend and Vaudois neighbor C. F. Ramuz on a story with music that would require only a small number of performers and musicians and thus could be performed on the cheap by a travelling theater in villages throughout Switzerland. (Ever mindful of practical considerations, the composer also made sure that the music was completely independent of the text, so that it could be performed on its own as a concert suite.) For his subject, Stravinsky cobbled together several Russian folk tales concerning a soldier's encounters with the devil in his various guises.

Subtitled "To be narrated, acted, and danced," *L'Histoire du soldat* had a cast of five at its premiere at the Théâtre de Lausanne in September, 1918: a formally attired narrator; the Soldier, who both speaks and acts; a Devil who speaks; a Devil who dances; and the Princess, who mimes and dances. The narrator was placed on a dais on one side of the stage, and the ensemble of seven musicians with its conductor was on the other, leaving a minuscule performing space in between. The stage curtains by a local painter, René Auberjonois, depicted fanciful nautical scenes unrelated both to the story and, obviously, to the Swiss setting.

In Kylián's version, the orchestra and conductor remain in the pit, and the narration is provided by an offstage recording. The playing area is a raised, slightly raked black platform fitted with numerous trapdoors. Though the platform nearly fills the huge Met stage, Kylián manages to maintain a sense of intimacy by having the characters enter and exit through the traps rather than from the wings. In an interview, Kylián aptly described the set's effect: "It looks like a trick box, a black box from which you pull out tricks onto the stage and have them disappear again." John Macfarlane's décor also makes clever use of the false floor: the Soldier's village is indicated by doll-sized two-dimensional trees and houses that emerge as in a children's pop-up book on the undersides of certain trapdoors when they are lifted. The exaggerated perspective suggested by the village's diminutive size also helps to emphasize the Soldier's distance from his former idyllic domestic life, which Kylián underlines by incorporating into the recorded narrative the sounds of faraway church bells and dogs barking.

Not all of Kylián's innovations were equally effective. Some of the extra personages he has conjured, such as the Soldier's Alter Ego and four Furies, are unnecessary as well as pretentious; and a vision of the Soldier's bereaved Mother and Fiancée that is whisked away at the moment when he accepts the Devil's bargain is jarring in its literalness. (The three couples who invade the Princess's bedroom to perform the tango, waltz, and ragtime, however, are in keeping with the spirit of music hall that pervades Stravinsky's music for this scene.) One must also question Kylián's decision to use the original French text. Not only are the words not tied to the music, but they are the work of a mediocre littérateur. Stravinsky himself did not see *L'Histoire* as being linked to any specific locale or culture and encouraged its adaptation to local audiences. As he himself pointed out, the place names and other regionalisms in the original text ("*Entre Denge et Denezy*. . .") only sounded Swiss; they were in fact imaginary.

"Ravel's opera *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* is a work of genius," George Balanchine told an interviewer shortly before the choreographer's death in 1983. On the occasion of Balanchine's third mounting of the work—this one for television—the conductor Manuel Rosenthal, who had been Ravel's pupil, called it his "masterpiece" and claimed that the composer knew it was his best score.

As a twenty-one-year-old neophyte choreographer with Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, Balanchine had been present at the creation of Ravel's "*fantaisie lyrique*" at Raoul Gunsbourg's Opéra de Monte Carlo in 1925. There *L'Enfant* had been a hit; but at the Opéra-Comique in Paris a year later, Ravel was criticized for his use of jazz, as well as for his "*duo miaulé musicalement*"—a duet of ascending and descending glissando meows for mezzo-soprano and baritone cats.

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Colette's libretto tells the story of a little boy who, bored with his lessons and gently scolded by his mother for his laziness, rebels by going on a rampage of destruction. Exhausted by his efforts, he starts to sink into an armchair when suddenly this piece of furniture comes to singing and dancing life, proclaiming that he wants no more of the wicked child. Soon all the familiar objects in the room follow suit: the delicate china cup, which, to the child's distress, dances flirtatiously with the vulgar black teapot; the shepherds and shepherdesses on the wallpaper, who remind the ungrateful child how they had kept watch over him; most poignant of all, his first love, the enchanted princess from his book of fairy tales, whose fate must now remain forever unresolved.

The child finds himself transported to the garden, where flora and fauna similarly come to life and complain of his wanton destructiveness. Among them is a squirrel, who berates the child for having imprisoned it in a cage. All the animals then turn on the child, and in the melee that follows, the squirrel is wounded. The child redeems himself by binding the wound with a ribbon; then, himself injured, he collapses in a stupor. The animals, impressed with the child's goodness, carry him back to the house. He holds out his arms to his mother and calls to her.

In the original production the singers appeared onstage. Like many other choreographers who have tackled this score, Kylián has separated the singing and dancing elements, relegating the vocalists to the pit. John Macfarlane's scenery beautifully evokes a cozy Normandy country house, the exaggerated scale of its furnishings meant to emphasize the smallness of the child. (Kylián has made the mother even larger than life by having her mimed by a man.) For the transition to the second scene, the room's walls fly up and away to reveal the lush garden, atmospherically moonlit by Jennifer Tipton. Among Macfarlane's wittiest costumes are a delicately sexy Chinese teacup shod in white high heels and carrying an Oriental paper parasol, whose "tutu" is a saucer, and a lumpish black teapot with a lid for a hat, who somewhat obscenely partners the cup through his spout.

In several instances Kylián has imaginatively departed from the letter of the libretto. Often these changes add a slightly sinister note. The wallpaper shepherd and shepherdess, for instance, hook the child about the neck with their staffs. And in the Freudian-tinged scene with the princess, she does not simply disappear into the earth as the impotent child bemoans his lack of a sword with which to rescue her. Instead, she is carried off by a rival prince, with whom the child vainly duels, succeeding only in cutting a piece of tulle from her dress, which he treats as if it were a favor given to a knight by his lady. It is with this scrap of fabric that the child will later bandage the squirrel's paw and earn his redemption.

In the second scene Kylián brings back the squirrel's cage that had been glimpsed earlier in the house, but now it is blown up to people size. This provides choreographic opportunity for the squirrel's dance; then, draped with a skirt and apron, the bell-shaped cage becomes the mother—an effect that actually refers back to Colette's libretto, which specifies in the first scene that the mother is to be represented only by an enormous skirt and accusatory index finger. Instead of being carried unconscious to her, the child must laboriously climb up the skirt and into her arms, making the final *"Maman!"* all the more heartrending for the effort it has required of the exhausted child.

Kylián's stagings of these narrative works by Stravinsky and Ravel raise hopes for other chamber operas and opera-ballets that have been neglected or mishandled by opera companies. But these hopes recede as one reads of the choreographer's plans for his next major project: a full-length opus set to music of Luciano Berio that "will have to do with perspective." Its "basic idea," Kylián explains, is that "you start with everything and you end with nothing"—which could well serve as a description of most of his works in this genre.

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Art

The shows must go on

by Jed Perl

The one-man gallery show is a nineteenth-century invention which freed artists from the tyranny of the Salon and the official commission and provided a very personal form of communication with the audience. By filling several public rooms with a range of recent works, artists could bring off an act of aesthetic self-revelation; and they're still doing this today, and the one-man show remains the essential way we see contemporary art. But the very intimacy of the contemporary art gallery, which is, among other things, an exclusive retail shop, militates against the one-man show achieving any large-scale audience. The general public is rather isolated from the gallery scene, and so there has grown up, parallel to this primary experience of contemporary art, a secondary experience, in the form of the museum show —whether an annual, biennial, theme show, ten-year survey, or mid-career retrospective. For the cognoscenti, all such museum shows are a recapitulation of what they've seen in the galleries already; for the rest of the public, they're the closest they'll probably ever get to the primary gallery experience.

Unfortunately, museum exhibitions of contemporary art obscure much more than they reveal. Shows like New York's Whitney Biennials falsify contemporary art by treating it as a panoramic spectacle—as something that can be taken in with a swivel of the head—when in truth art is now more than ever before powered by personal, idiosyncratic visions. Some curators have acknowledged the weakness of the smorgasbord-style exhibition by organizing big shows that are made up of many little solo shows. Examples include the "Individuals" exhibition currently at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, which covers a quarter century, and this past summer's ten-year survey, "L'époque, la mode, la morale, la passion," at the Pompidou Center in Paris. These shows are an improvement, but they still have the effect of giving to the individual statement that is the solo show an irrelevant curatorial sanction—a kind of laying on of the hands of historical importance. The Whitney Biennials and the Pompidou survey don't only report on trends—they make them, they force contemporary art into an officially sanctioned historical frame, and in doing so place an unhealthy pressure on a gallery scene that would be best off left to its own often questionable enough devices.

It was much noted last spring that the 1987 Whitney Biennial had a very different look from the one in 1985. Where the 1985 Biennial had been glittery and neon-bright and casually erotic, this one was grayed-over, tasteful, severe. The show looked to some like a return to seriousness; but this was only true in the sense that gray flannel is serious. The Whitney show certainly had a new decor; its personality had changed. But personality isn't character, and the character of the Biennial—which is indifferent to the high seriousness and the high fun of aesthetic experience—remained unchanged. The

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Biennial is still nothing more than the place where the permanent government of the New York art world announces what's in and what's out. The Biennial's bow to tradition consisted of two marmoreal statues by Louise Bourgeois and a couple of De Koonings. These works didn't tell us anything about where we come from, only that De Kooning, who a few years ago could do nothing *but* paint beautifully, can't even do that anymore. And as for where we are, the show told you about as little as a night at Nell's, the club where one of the Whitney curators is said to hang out. From the point of view of the real life of art in New York—the beautiful things that do appear in the galleries; the phone calls and conversations that go back and forth when something exciting is going on somewhere—the Biennial was beside the point. And yet Arthur Danto, the art critic for *The Nation,* who rarely reviews anything but museum shows and has a big following among the New York intellectuals, could leave the Biennial and reassure his readers that although the art was terrible, "the problem this year is not with the Whitney but with the world of art. What is shown is what, alas, alas, alas, there is." This may assuage the guilt of some few readers who don't go to galleries but think they should—now they know they aren't missing anything. But it simply isn't true. So far as I'm concerned, any Biennial that excluded Gabriel Laderman's terrific *House of Death and Life*—the ripest figure composition we've seen since Balthus last showed in New York—is irrelevant. The Biennial contained not a single work of art that has meant something to me in the galleries during the past two years.

Abstraction was in evidence at the Biennial, and of a kind—crowded, teeming with incident—that might have seemed, a decade ago, the necessary antidote to Minimalism and to the emptying-out of the surface in Sixties painting. Yet the canvases of George Condo and Lari Pittman, which are very busy works, prove little except that more can be a bore, too. These artists have a most debased sense of the Surrealist imagery they are working out of; for them, symbolic abstraction is an idea with no grounding in the experience of the medium. Condo and Pittman are being called post-conceptual painters—and the tag fits, because they see painting from the outside, as if one could lay claim to painting without accepting the demands painting makes upon the artist. The real movement within abstraction is more interesting than the Biennial could possibly suggest, and has to do with abstraction's final acceptance that its revolutionary mission has spent itself. Abstraction must now succeed as a genre of painting with no greater or more urgent hold on our imaginations than any other. Perhaps it's this normalization of abstraction that makes its relation to representation seem far less an adversarial one than heretofore.

Bill Jensen—a very gifted abstract painter last featured at the Whitney in the "Five Painters in New York" show in 1984—seems to be moving more and more in the direction of a kind of fantastical landscape painting. His show at the Washburn Gallery in April, which consisted of watercolors that were either studies for or studies after his oils, was his least satisfactory exhibition in recent years, partly because the illusionistic and illustrative element in his images was getting out of hand. Without the weight of an oil paint surface to hold down his biomorphic shapes and moonscape hills and vales, the pictures began to go teasingly three-dimensional. In watercolor the storytelling aspect of his work came all too much to the fore; everything became overly clear. One missed those overworked ground swells of paint, those scraped and troweled surfaces (and the bite of the burin and the acid, which gives his prints their distinction).

When a popular artist like Jensen, best known for his paintings, fills a gallery with watercolors or drawings, we may wonder whether he wants to show us another side of his work, or whether he is just looking for some quick sales. Coming at the same time that David Salle was filling Mary Boone with his watercolors, and Terry Winters was filling

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Sonnabend with his drawings, Jensen's show had a bit of the feeling of an accommodation to the collectors who aren't up to the painting prices (or haven't had a crack at Jensen's small output). Salle's entire career is a knee-jerk reaction to fashion—one expects rampant commercialism from him; and likewise from Winters, whose mud-colored abstractions of floating plant forms are the most overrated paintings of the moment. Jensen is on a different plane from Salle or Winters. He isn't a bad watercolorist; he's reaching to respond to the delicacy of the medium. But the dryness of the works in this show had the effect of highlighting how much Jensen's success so far has been based on a sensuously visionary grasp of images—and one wonders how much farther he can go with that. Rendered in the tight, rather schematic manner of the watercolors (he's not a splasher), his magic was on the point of evaporating. His work seemed to be walking a very fine line, with a retardataire biomorphism to one side, and academic Surrealism to the other.

How illusionistic can abstraction be? This is one of the questions Jensen leaves you asking; it's also probably the central question raised by Frank Stella's *Working Space* lectures, which were given at Harvard in 1983 and came out in book form a year ago.[1] For Stella the third dimension means Caravaggio; and it's symptomatic of how charged with implications illusionism has become that the third dimension seems to carry, as a sort of payoff, in Stella's telling, the promise of a Caravaggesque dramaturgy. Through some audacity or wishful thinking, Stella hopes to convince us that we can have Caravaggio's theater without his leering boys or histrionic Biblical characters. This sounds pretty farfetched, and yet Stella isn't alone in reaching for a New (Abstract) Baroque. Jensen's taste is tending toward the curvilinear and spacially flamboyant—

1 See Tim Hilton's review of *Working Space,* "Frank Stella's Crisis," in the February, 1987 issue of *The New Criterion.*

important works by

balthus
butler
chagall
dubuffet
giacometti
lam
mac iver
mason
millares
miró
riopelle
rouan
saura
tanguy
zao wou-ki

pierre matisse gallery
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characteristics of the Baroque. And in Al Held's show at Emmerich in April, the work, which has been illusionistic for years, looked quite a bit like Piranesiesque interiors waiting for the figures to appear. Held—who has been closely associated with the art school at Yale, where representational painting has its strong advocates—may be competing with some of the recent, highly sculptural breed of figure painters. His paintings were mildly enjoyable in a sci-fi kind of way. When abstraction goes baroque, science fiction can't be far behind. In May, at Paula Cooper's SoHo gallery, Elizabeth Murray broke out into a series of cartoonishly baroque forms that looked rather like those of the sci-fi graffiti artist Kenny Scharf, who was showing a block away at Shafrazi and being hailed, by Dan Cameron in a catalogue essay, as really an abstract painter after all.

That abstraction can be many different things is a happy idea, for confirmation of which we need only look to the Klee show last spring, or the beautiful Miró retrospective which was at the Guggenheim over the summer. To the extent that contemporary abstraction does become more variously expressive, it will have to give up its post-World War II stance as the supreme public decorative art. In Stella's *Working Space* there's much gesturing toward the importance of the arcane symbolic images of the later Kandinsky; but Stella doesn't really go very deeply into those miniaturized universes of Kandinsky's Parisian period, probably because they wouldn't, after all, do anything much for the lobbies of the corporate headquarters where Stella has been apotheosized. Bill Jensen interests us because he wants us to know about something—a revelation, a moment of insight—that he's had while alone in his studio. For the catalogue of last summer's Corcoran Biennial, in which some exhibitors were asked to contribute a statement or some quotations, Jensen offered Georges Braque's beautiful words about painting being a process of impregnation, hallucination, obsession. Terry Winters—who was in both the Corcoran and Whitney Biennials—doesn't know from mystery. He's just lifting it from the biology textbooks. Winters is a lab technician who impersonates the star scientist; he passes off the most ordinary specimens as new forms of life.

Though the needlepoint pictures of Nicolas Moufarrege weren't included in the 1985 Whitney Biennial, they epitomize that infamous Biennial's mood—they epitomize it and they transcend it; they prove that low-culture images can be transformed into high-culture fun. Moufarrege, who died young in 1985, was the subject of a memorial exhibit at the Clocktower this past summer. His pictures are high-camp confections, but they're constructed with an elegance that holds you—and holds in your mind.

Born in Alexandria, Egypt of Lebanese parents in 1947, Moufarrege came to the East Village via Beirut and Paris. According to René Ricard, in an obituary that was first published in *The Village Voice,* "He invented the Lower East Side. 'Nicolas Moufarrege made me,' Gracie Mansion [the art dealer] insists. Of course, she's right. But nothing was too big or too small to escape the scope of his enthusiasms and he could always see the future in things." We've heard a good deal about how hot the East Village scene was when it was really hot (it seems to be finished now); but Moufarrege may be the only artist who got some of that kitsch-without-end spirit into a form that has staying power on a gallery wall. He seems, from the evidence of his art, his writings (for *Arts* and other magazines), and the comments of his friends, which have been collected in the Clocktower catalogue,[2] to have had some of the exotic charm and oracular charisma of an earlier emigré painter and author, John Graham.

Moufarrege began working in thread on needlepoint canvas while he lived in Paris in

2 The catalogue, entitled *Nicolas A. Moufarrege,* lists as its organizers Tim Greathouse, Cynthia Kuebel, *et alia,* and is published by the Institute for Art and Urban Resources/ The Clocktower (47 pages, $8).

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the Seventies, and those architectural fantasies, in which skyscrapers and fragments of classical architecture float around in an indeterminate tan- or rust-colored space, aren't anything much. They have a sort of Art Deco élan that may have passed for chic in Europe a decade ago, but which looks pallid and artsy-craftsy today. Though Moufarrege is said to have been poor in Paris, he managed to have a show with Jacques Damaze, an elegant dealer associated with Sonia Delaunay and other School of Paris figures; perhaps the understated decorativeness of his Paris work was born of a misguided attempt to do something really classy. When he arrived in New York in 1981—he became, almost immediately, a figure at P.S. 1 in Long Island City—he was released from good taste into our Baghdad-by-the-Hudson, this democracy of trash.

In the four years he worked in New York, Moufarrege held onto his embroidery technique, and it's this anti-high-art technique that gives his work its warmth and its insouciance, its convincing unwillingness to compete with the "grown-up" domain of paint on canvas. But if Moufarrege didn't put himself into competition with high art, he still kept broadening the range of his work, switching to full color, and making his references both more various and more specific. His first gallery show, at Gabrielle Bryers in 1983, consisted of long, scroll-shaped canvases, on which Moufarrege unfurled a glittery array of comic-strip superheroes, warriors from nineteenth-century Japanese prints, fragments of Thirties Picasso, and Arabic words. On the see-through needlepoint canvas he worked in colored and metallic threads, leaving some areas bare, painting on others, encrusting fake rhinestones and pieces of junk jewelry. He built up a lavishly tacky Arabian Nights surface—an overloaded surface, layered with echoes of his image-saturated brain, where, to quote him, "East and West, Michelangelo and the Sheik of Araby, Coca Cola and the Eiffel Tower" mingled. The 1983 scrolls are small by today's standards—a foot-and-a-half high, four or five feet wide. They don't

Isabel McIlvain

Recent Sculpture
September 1 – 30, 1987

Youth, 1987, bronze, 38½ inches high

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blow up all those pop images; they bring them into the artist's own microcosmic world.

One key work from 1983 (untitled; it's #20 in the Clocktower show) has at its center a drawing of a wide-eyed, openmouthed boy wearing a pair of big, old-fashioned earphones; he looks like something out of an illustration in an elementary-school textbook. This ham-radio kid may be a stand-in for Moufarrege; around him, to left and right, unfolds the artist's rollicking cartoon imaginings, a stream of zips and zaps from comic books, *Guernica,* the nineteenth-century printmakers Kuniyoshi and Yoshitoshi. To the left, there's a greeting-card Santa Claus, who holds a gift list on which are inscribed the words Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Vietnam. Moufarrege doesn't force these names on us—he just drops them there, and lets the horrific downside of modern life intermingle. I wouldn't think the buccaneers of kids' TV were really anything I'd want to look at; but Moufarrege keeps me interested in these modern kiddie icons. In a painting where a superhero in green trunks is shown as responsible for the dismemberment of one of the figures in *Guernica,* the convergence of high and low sources really clicks.

The works from 1984 and 1985—they were shown at the FUN Gallery just after Moufarrege died—are very different in temper. The color tends to primaries or clear pastels; the mood isn't any longer smarmy and overheated. Here Moufarrege is joining rectangles of imagery into contructivist images. The combination of elegance and silliness is one we know from a great deal of mid-Eighties art; but when Moufarrege combines a Roy Lichtenstein and a Van Gogh, or a Fragonard and a Picasso, he's not doing it for free-floating ambiguity, in the David Salle manner. Moufarrege builds a little story in each picture. In one there's a cartoon of Donald and Mickey going fishing, and the balloon over their heads, with its exclamation "LOOK MICKEY . . ." refers to the hunk of a male torso they've pulled in from the lower left. The silliness of the Disney image cuts the allure of the rippling muscles—it's a gentle joke on cruising. Moufarrege is a Roy Lichtenstein aficionado—which I'm not—but I like Moufarrege's Pop takeoffs, anyway. When he redoes Lichtenstein in needlepoint he seems to me to 1) bring this Pop artist down to his real worth, as an amusing illustrator; and 2) extend the jokes. Moufarrege joins a Lichtenstein of a girl moaning, "OH JEFF . . . I LOVE YOU TOO . . . BUT . . ." with a half-filled-in paint-by-number landscape, which becomes a representation of her confused mind. The Lichtenstein woman who's drowning, exclaiming, "I DON'T CARE! I'D RATHER SINK—THAN CALL BRAD FOR HELP!" overlaps a detail of Hokusai's *Great Wave*; and the blonde, her hair blown by a city breeze, wondering, "M-MAYBE HE BECAME ILL AND COULDN'T LEAVE THE STUDIO!" is set beside a Van Gogh self-portrait, with the bandaged ear. Some of these images are framed in rectangles of Mondrianish red, yellow, and blue; the pictures are like little skits, played out in the prop room of world art. And the needlepoint technique is fairly interesting; Moufarrege works the thread in different directions and lengths for texture, for movement.

The more Moufarrege gets into high culture, the more interesting the work becomes. Some of his last works combine needlepoint pictures, needlepoint canvases pre-printed with images from Fragonard, Renoir, or Guido Reni, and inexpensive neo-Egyptian yard goods. When Moufarrege gives us two needlepoint canvases after a Fragonard next to each other, he reminds me of Joseph Cornell, who paid homage to Bronzino and other great artists by filling his boxes with reproductions of their work. Cornell and Moufarrege don't use mechanical copies of masterpieces in order to devalue art; they mean to show us how its aura survives even in these debased, ghostly forms. There's humility in these quotations. Cornell and Moufarrege seem to be saying that reproductions are all they can take. Confronted with the real thing, they might OD.

One untitled painting from 1985 (#24 at the Clocktower) is about graffiti through

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Oulton
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the ages. A Lichtenstein-style hand holding a spray can is juxtaposed with two Fragonards of a girl carving on a tree trunk, over one of which Moufarrege has graffitied, in needlepoint, his own name, NICK. (This made a beautiful cover for the Clocktower catalogue.) In *Music,* a Renoir of two girls at the piano (partly needlepointed) is set into a larger rectangle of cotton fabric printed with Egyptian tomb paintings of women playing music. Joined to this is a Lichtenstein of a woman who hears bars of music coming through a window. The ensemble is seductively fey. It works because of the little flickers of embroidery, the amusing juxtapositions, the informality of it all. Moufarrege is making love to the whole image world of East Village New York—and he doesn't use his knowledge to aggrandize himself, or make it all seem more important than it really is.

The temper of Moufarrege's work reminds me in some general way of Frank O'Hara's poetry. There's the same super-sophisticated appreciation of the surfaces of urban culture; the same faintly Dadaist lack of depth. I can imagine Moufarrege admiring the young man in the orange shirt who, in O'Hara's "Having a Coke with You," looks "like a better happier St. Sebastian." I can imagine Moufarrege, with O'Hara, waking up in the morning and exclaiming, "oh god it's wonderful / to get out of bed / and drink too much coffee / and smoke too many cigarettes." And surely Moufarrege would have told the "Mothers of America"—

> let your kids go to the movies!
> get them out of the house so they won't know
> what you're up to
> it's true that fresh air is good for the body
> but what about the soul
> that grows in darkness, embossed by silvery
> images.

The appeal of Moufarrege's work rests in its tomorrow-we-shall-die exuberance. It's an attitude that's knit into the fabric of a city like New York, where the line between art and fashion isn't always clear, and where

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both art and fashion can be seen as an affirmation of the present, an assertion of the marvelousness of the moment. Moufarrege catches something of this moment. His compositions are brilliant after-images from the fast-track life of modern bohemian New York.

In May at Sperone Westwater, Carlo Maria Mariani showed a series of portraits of art-world luminaries—Jasper Johns, Julian Schnabel, and so on—done in a highly finished academic style. These were accompanied by some of the oversized portraits of thick-limbed, sentimentally neoclassical boy-gods that Mariani, who was born in 1931, has been doing for some years. The show demonstrated a certain level of traditional technical proficiency wedded to a very mopy and ultimately lazy pictorial sensibility. This combination of conscientious manual labor and mental slothfulness is common among the many artists who have in recent years (both in Europe and the USA) taken up a neoclassical style. In America the neoclassical revival began as a radical critique of established modern values; but as it has turned out the work sells like hotcakes. Corporate art buyers are delighted to find their own philistinism confirmed by figure compositions that come from the best contemporary galleries gift-wrapped in a lot of humanistic claptrap.

A show that included Mariani, called "Modern Myths/Classical Renewal," is touring around the country this fall, and though I haven't seen it, I've been pretty familiar over a period of years with the work of many of the artists included, and have watched as their painting has gone from problematical to hopeless. Ten years ago Martha Mayer Erlebacher was struggling to achieve a Düreresque clarity of form, and did some portraits and figures that had a blunt, simple dignity; but as she's begun to feel comfortable with her technique, her unpardonable bad taste, which runs to nudes surrounded by picnic debris, has taken over, and that technique of hers now looks as trite as Paul Cadmus's. Something similar has happened to Bruno Civitico, whose early nudes had a sort of primitive charm, but whose work is increasingly hard and unfeeling. Once certain technical matters have been mastered, these artists collapse into mannerisms. All along, no doubt, they've been trying to fit themselves into a fixed and inflexible idea of what classicism is. They think there's one classicism, when of course classicism must be reinvented by every generation, and is different for Phidias, Botticelli, Raphael, Poussin, David, Puvis. Like the Pre-Raphaelites, these current artists are in love with an idea that exists nowhere but in their own sentimental imaginings. They're also totally uncritical about the draggy side of classicism. Poussin's second *Et in Arcadia ego* may be a masterpiece, but who wants more pictures of shepherds mooning over old tombs? No one since Puvis has used a tunic or a toga convincingly—and Puvis, though a great painter, is a great painter almost in spite of the sentimentality of his art.

Richard Piccolo, who had a show in the Robert Schoelkopf Gallery in May, has one foot in the neoclassical thing. Since his first one-man exhibit at Schoelkopf in 1975, he's toyed with arcadian themes, but he's had the good sense to give his nostalgia a more pointed form. A longtime resident of Italy, Piccolo seems to want to inhabit a sort of eighteenth- or nineteenth-century Italian provincial world, where broken statuary and other reminiscences of classicism are found amidst the rustic furniture and earthenware jugs, and where the young women would be muses if only there was a poet around. In other words, Piccolo is up front about the romanticism of his classicism.

Piccolo's 1975 show was a virtuoso debut made up of brooding seventeenth-century-looking landscapes, in the foregrounds of which oversized vegetables loomed surrealistically. There were problems with those paintings. The foregrounds and backgrounds didn't go together, the compositions didn't exactly "work"; but the pictures had brilliance, and an enviable esprit. As time has gone on, Piccolo, unlike the other neoclassicists, has held onto his esprit; but like the

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rest, he's gotten into a bind where his retrospective mood makes it impossible for him to break through. His eyes are focused on the past, and so there's something crotchety about his figure compositions, in which a young woman frequently sits near a table on which some interesting objects are arranged. The figure painting is stiff, but it's probably a difficulty not with knowing the anatomy so much as with finding a way to express that knowledge. What we miss is a guiding principle, a practical plan.

It's in the smaller paintings that Piccolo's beautiful feeling for grayed-over, pink-and-green color combinations, and for the way a brush can bring a surface to life, pulls him through. His small Italian landscapes—with their stormy weather and their mountains, roads, houses, wee figures—are like essences of Mediterranean history. A duet of tiny still lifes in the recent show—representing the sculptor's and the writer's table—were the kind of deliciously deft pictures you might expect to find in a corner of an old museum and linger over. I wasn't quite clear on how the allegory in these two still lifes was supposed to go—I couldn't identify all the objects—but their nostalgia, for the days when an artist could work quietly in a rural hideaway perfecting his metier, had a certain urgency, and carried me along. I didn't leave Piccolo's show with my back up, as I usually do when a contemporary painter seems intent on convincing us that they did everything better in the olden days. (What kind of an attitude is that for an artist who's painting *now*?) There's much that's experienced firsthand in Piccolo's painting; he's obviously exhilarated by what he's doing. He's a very odd phenomenon: a real artist caught in the grasp of an unreal idea.

Though Nell Blaine, who was born in 1922, began as an abstract painter back in the Forties, you wouldn't know it from the cozily ebullient flower pieces and still lifes and landscapes she's been doing since the Fifties. Seldom more than a couple of feet in any direction, and full of the kind of old-friends-in-combat clashes of alizarin and green, or orange and blue, that have been a staple of neo-Fauvist painting for seventy-five years, Blaine's canvases don't grab out at the viewer, or make a dashing impression hanging on a wall. Each of her bouquets or unexceptional New England vistas appears self-involved. Her brushwork, which is made up of jots and flashes of oil paint, is like a kind of sloppy knitwork, pulling the surface together casually, erratically. Though Blaine is without a doubt the best flower painter at work today, her painting can sometimes seem a little dull, and though I've followed her work for years and admired it, I've also missed a show here and there, because it didn't seem urgently necessary to go.

Why her show at the Fischbach Gallery last April hit me so explosively I'm not entirely sure. It may be that I'd just come from that sullen Whitney Biennial and was itching for someone who knew how to paint. Or it may be that I'd forgotten to what a degree Blaine really inhabits that world of hers. Or it may be that this show really was a breakaway one for Blaine. Whatever the reason, the two rooms at Fischbach were dazzling: Blaine was going great guns, carrying all before her. The show included the best Blaine landscape I've ever seen, *Gloucester Harbor from Banner Hill,* a horizontal, quivering vision in which the artist manages to be true to the bobbing boats of a small New England harbor and the dull vegetation on the nearby shore, and also to fill it all with some personal warmth and intimacy —a sense that these things are seen through *her* eyes. Better yet was still life called *Summer Interior with Open Book,* a view of an overloaded table, a set of sliding glass doors, and the garden outside. The scene itself is almost insistently unchic—everything crowded and ordinary, reflecting a sort of messy summer-house generosity. With its book and vase full of flowers and miscellaneous objects, this painting is shut up tight when you first look at it; but gradually it begins to break open, with rivulets of color slipping this way and that in space, carrying you over an object, out the window, around a shrub. Blaine's color is pretty, but with a tough edge. One

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could almost say that her toughness rests within her prettiness—you have to be rather tough to dare to paint pretty nowadays.

Fairfield Porter once wrote this in defense of Raoul Dufy's habit of painting the same subjects: "To ask why he did again and again what he had succeeded in once is to miss the importance of a pleasure repeated, like orange juice for breakfast every day." That's probably how Blaine feels about the repetition in her work, too. Her subject is the extraordinary lift one can receive from ordinary things. Several young artists I know who are attuned to the kind of work Blaine does didn't get much from her show, which makes me think that perhaps hers is an especially grown-up sensibility. Her work comes out of an acceptance that this-is-the-way-it-is. Her magic is in the way she takes you into a normal but beautiful world. She doesn't take a form and clarify it, as Louisa Matthiasdottir will do when she paints a still life or a bouquet. Matthiasdottir improves on nature—she almost geometricizes it. Blaine gives it to us with all the messy bits intact. Blaine's bouquets, with their daffodils and anemones and roses, all very plain and very lovely, aren't arrangements. They flop around in a jar or a vase, or stand packed together in a clump, just as they came in from the garden or the florist's shop. These beautiful blazes of color are often plopped right in the middle of the canvas, like a centerpiece on a table. Half-a-dozen of the flower pieces in the recent show were extraordinary. Of *Carnival Bouquet* I can only say it lives up to its altogether appropriate name.

Blaine is one of the valuable group of painterly realists who came up in the late Forties. Along with Leland Bell and Louisa Matthiasdottir, she was a member of the Jane Street co-operative gallery; their work —like that of Jane Freilicher, Fairfield Porter, Robert De Niro, and some others—has for years now had a discerning and appreciative audience. Blaine has had forty-eight solo shows, and this amazing number speaks for a life of bouquets, landscapes, interiors—a life of experiences, recorded in her no-nonsense style. Of course we can get worn out by the long line of her one-woman exhibitions, year upon year, each rather like the one before, a series of nearly like experiences. And yet when Nell Blaine's show went up in April, just before the Whitney Biennial opened its doors, those two rooms at Fischbach on Fifty-seventh Street had an urgency and an immediacy that put everything else in New York to shame.

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Letter from Washington

Booksellers at play

by Martha Bayles

John Hammond, the famous impresario of popular music who died last July, once remarked that, unlike the other Manhattan socialities who bopped up to Harlem in the 1920s, he was never interested in "slumming." Rather he went out of "passion"—a passion that persisted throughout his long career of discovering, producing, and otherwise encouraging performers ranging from Bessie Smith to Billie Holiday, Benny Goodman to Count Basie, Bob Dylan to Bruce Springsteen.

The distinction between slumming and passion came to mind last Memorial Day weekend, when the weather in Washington turned muggy and twenty-two thousand people converged on the Convention Center for the largest-ever Convention and Trade Exhibit of the American Booksellers Association. Like the high-rolling patrons of the Cotton Club, the elite of this gathering put on a respectable show during the day, schmoozing through the crowded aisles in their tailored silk dresses and three-piece suits, dutifully husbanding their rich inheritance of literate culture. But at sunset, how swiftly they donned their proletarian denim, their perforated black leather, their Banana Republic gear! How eagerly they piled into the first uptown cab that cruised along!

Not that they cruised all that far. A few hardy souls were spotted in the nightclubs of Adams Morgan, the one Washington neighborhood where the Third World meets the Nerd World. Others appeared at such youth-culture temples as the 9:30 and the Bayou. But none were reported in the true outposts of black D.C.: places like the Ibex, the Odyssey, or the Five Points. And the majority of literate adventurers did not even venture beyond the confines of the convention, because their entertainment needs were met by the giants of the industry, who lavished generous promotional budgets on extravaganzas of cultural slumming.

It was slumming, not passion, that prevailed at Knopf's mega-party for Jane and Michael Stern, the authors of *Elvis World*. Published this past summer, *Elvis World* is a coffee-table confection for highbrows fascinated by the still-thriving Elvis cult. Knopf may harbor hopes of mass sales, but I doubt the book will be bought by authentic Elvis cultists—the sort of people who make pilgrimages to Graceland, commune with the singer's rhinestoned ghost, and incinerate unauthorized biographies by brash ex-girlfriends bringing paternity suits against his estate. More likely, *Elvis World* will be snapped up by the Sterns' existing readership—the sort of people who enjoy all-American kitsch because their education and income have placed them at a safe distance from it.

To some extent, I confess to being among this readership. *Good Food*, the Sterns' compendium of plain and fancy roadside restaurants, has guided my loved ones and me through several local, regional, and transcontinental automobile trips. As a friend

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from overseas commented after salivating his way through a particularly vivid description of Maryland crabcakes, "Anyone who writes this way about food deserves to be taken seriously."

About Elvis, however, not even the Sterns take the Sterns seriously. *Elvis World* was not their idea, they explained to me the morning after the mega-party. Nor does it reflect the urbane eclecticism of Sonny Mehta, Knopf's new president and editor in chief. Rather, the inspiration came from Robert Gottlieb, Mr. Mehta's predecessor and the present editor of *The New Yorker*, who, as any intermediate-level literatus can tell you, collects "Americana" and keeps a bust of Elvis on his desk. The full text of *Elvis World* was not available at this writing, but a sample of its vivid prose and colorful illustrations was handed out at the mega-party, in a shopping bag that also yielded a Hershey bar and a liquid-filled ballpoint pen containing a tiny panorama of Graceland and a tiny, floating figure of the King.

My complaint, apart from having been told by a phalanx of young guards that I could take only one shopping bag, has to do with the lack of passion everyone displayed toward the actual phenomenon of Elvis. As the mild-mannered Sterns observed, "Our book's not about music, it's about Presleiana." Presleiana is not a goddess, but a category of Americana which includes such items as a cardboard display of Elvis Presley adjustable rings, dated 1956 and currently selling for over two thousand dollars. At the mega-party, Presleiana also meant gold lamé tablecloths, twenty-five-cent hot dogs, a shiny red '59 Cadillac, and a plastic jukebox twenty times normal size. These droll trappings were absurdly dwarfed by the 160-foot-high atrium of the Pension Building, a Corinthian immensity looming above the festivities rather as Knopf's past could be said to loom above that particular moment of its present.

Such wallowing in the schlocky mediocrity of Elvis's later career might have been forgivable, if the mega-party had also included a taste of his early music. But even the Sterns expressed disappointment with the band hired by Knopf's party planner—one of those local "general business" combos that play a smidgen of everything to suit all tastes at weddings, bar mitzvahs, and intellectual policy conferences. The trouble was, they couldn't manage a smidgen of the rockabilly/rhythm and blues that launched Elvis's career.

But that didn't faze the crowd. As *The Washington Post* reported after the conference, "The floor was packed with bodies doing the usual bouncing and helter-skelter," and a close colleague of Mr. Gottlieb's was quoted saying she had "never seen Gottlieb dancing with such élan." I found this appalling because I found the music appalling. Why couldn't Knopf's party planner have tracked down a group like the recently reunited Sun Rhythm Section, six veterans who accompanied the mid-1950s Memphis recording sessions of (among others) Elvis and Jerry Lee Lewis? I heard those grey-haired gentlemen a week later at the Chicago Blues Festival, and believe me, they can still produce a sound so infectious it could coax a tap from the toe of Allan Bloom. Even rock 'n' roll's harshest critic would have to acknowledge their superiority over the dismal noise that ricocheted off the mighty pillars of the Pension Building that evening, while the literati boogied.

On the other hand, why shouldn't the literati boogie? Publishers, editors, booksellers, even publicists work long, hard days making tough decisions about the printed word. When they go out to party, why should they tax their weary brains with more tough decisions about whether or not the music stinks? As long as everyone's having a good time, who cares?

I wouldn't care, if this were, say, a convention of air traffic controllers. Whatever the link between tastelessness and airplane crashes, I daresay it's more tenuous than the one between pop-cultural slumming and high-cultural bankruptcy. The ABA convention was chock-full of "book lovers" quick to insist that their truest enjoyment was the exercise of the mind's critical faculties. Yet

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when invited by a cultural authority such as Knopf to indulge their appetite for popular culture, they eagerly suspended those faculties, admitting with a shrug: "We know it's junk, but we love it."

The Elvis party was particularly revealing of this slumming mentality, because its smorgasbord of kitsch was laid out so passively before the consumer. Sovereign, amused, the partygoer was free to come and go; free to flit between bar, dance floor, hot-dog stand, and red Caddy; and most important, free from intimidation by anyone more impressive, in pop-cultural terms, than himself. Despite their being performers of a sort, neither the white-suited Elvis impersonator nor the pathetic Gene Donati Orchestra commanded much attention; it was clear that their status ranked a mere notch above the bartenders'. For someone to admire, the happy book lover had only himself, the unassuming Sterns, and, of course, Book Lover Numero Uno, the aforementioned boody-shaking Mr. Gottlieb. It was an arrangement calculated to enhance the book lover's enjoyment, not only of the kitsch, but also of his own feelings of cultural superiority. To those who boogie ironically, it helps when the music stinks.

Irony was less in evidence the following evening, when several publishers (including Ingram, Crown, Viking/Penguin, Simon & Schuster, Paperjacks, and Bridge) threw a bash at the Hyatt Regency which headlined a personage who deserves more than Elvis to be titled "The King of Rock 'n' Roll": Chuck Berry. (Mr. Berry's autobiography—". . . entirely written, phrase by phrase, by yours truly, Chuck Berry"—will be published in October by Harmony Books, a division of Crown.) Like any seasoned performer who has served time before audiences of his erstwhile social betters, the sixty-year-old Mr. Berry seems to have a solid strategy for dealing with the slumming mentality. First the opening band—a general-business group that meant business—galvanized the crowd with a steady flow of perfectly rendered rhythm-and-blues, soul, doo-wop, and rock

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hits, while also tweaking them with humorous references to the impossibly highbrow standards of educated white folks. Then the band added a fresh tweak by rendering, equally perfectly, a couple of innocuous mainstream hits that served to remind the highbrows that white middle-class people in general have pretty bland musical tastes.

Once this work of dressing down the sophisticates was done, Mr. Berry sent his daughter, Ingrid, out to sing a mess of steamy blues. By the time she got finished with them, the audience had been reduced to their true state as a screaming, floor-stomping mob of Chuck Berry fans. After that it was a breeze for the man himself to come out and deliver his standard forty-five-minute set, which included two duets with Ingrid, four or five spectacular guitar riffs, and one duck walk. The conquest was perfect, if brief.

I say "brief" because even such masterful showmanship provides only temporary relief from the slumming mentality. As soon as our cultural slummer encounters another of his ilk who wishes to discuss a serious literary topic, such as the interrelated themes of patriarchy and societal violence in the three novels plus twelve articles published last month by Joyce Carol Oates, he forgets all about the thrill of having been a wildly enthusiastic Chuck Berry fan. With an ironic smile, he confesses to having gotten a little carried away at the ABA. But he won't waste his valuable brain cells pondering the meaning of such experiences, or their relation to the rest of what he considers culture. He would sooner analyze his sex life.

Most likely, he considers Chuck Berry to be part of his sex life. The standard explanation offered for the 1950s rock 'n' roll phenomenon is that it unleashed the long-repressed libido of the nation—or at least of the nation's youth. (For reiteration of this line, see any book published on the subject during the last thirty years, including *Elvis World* by Jane and Michael Stern.) Unfortunately, this reduction of rock music to simple sexual stimulation removes it from the realm of culture, where it needs to be criticized, and places it in the realm of instinct, where it needs only to be experienced. And with regard to latter-day forms such as punk, heavy metal, and porn rock, the cultural slummer still doesn't criticize. He may not enjoy the stuff, but the last thing he wants to do is prevent someone else, especially someone younger, from being turned on by it. At the most, he admits he's getting old.

There was one person at the convention who was not afraid to express disapproval of the assorted excesses of contemporary popular culture. In a tiny, difficult-to-locate cubicle, a dozen spectators showed up for a bloody and obscene slide show hosted by Tipper Gore, the wife of Senator Albert Gore of Tennessee. Among upright, censorship-fearing book lovers, Mrs. Gore has acquired a reputation as a prude who wants to purge American society of all erotically liberating influences, especially rock music. Needless to say, there were no long lines of admiring readers waiting for Mrs. Gore to autograph her book, *Raising PG Kids in an X-Rated Society* (Abington), and no bashes featuring onstage simulations of fellatio at gunpoint followed by decapitation—the sort of light amusements currently being purveyed by the music industry to its twelve- and thirteen-year-old consumers. Mrs. Gore advocates, instead of censorship, the dissemination of information about this kind of entertainment to the public, so that parents in particular may know what is being sold to their children and exert appropriate pressure upon those who are selling it. Another word for this sort of activity is criticism. But as we've seen, criticism of popular culture is not a high priority with the highbrows. They'd rather close their minds and dance.

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Books

Saving Rupert Brooke

by Gloria G. Fromm

In mute testimony, perhaps, to the passing of his famous hour, *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* (1973) is utterly silent about Rupert Brooke's well-known lines and lineaments. In *A History of Modern Poetry*, however, the first volume of which appeared in 1976, David Perkins speaks loud and clear: "[Brooke's] legend is now dead and, without it, neither the man nor the poetry is likely to sustain interest." Yet just a few years later, the Bloomsbury memoirist John Lehmann argued that, with the new materials (letters and reminiscences) available since Christopher Hassall's "monumental" biography (1964) and Geoffrey Keynes's edition of the letters (1968), a more realistic portrait of the man and estimate of the poet had been made possible. In effect, Lehmann tried to modernize Rupert Brooke, matching his personal qualities with the strengths and weaknesses of his poems and sorting out the ironies and ambiguities as well as the achievements of an unfinished life. Now, in a book marking the centenary of Brooke's birth,[1] Paul Delany (of *D. H. Lawrence's Nightmare* fame) rejects Lehmann's Brooke as adding up to no more than "a repressed homosexual" and assures us that since the poet's premature death in 1915 his "reputation has gone through the whole cycle from adulation to contemptuous dismissal without any trustworthy account of the kind of person he really was."

Furthermore, Delany claims that Brooke's significance today lies in the cultural moment his life can elucidate and that "restor[ing] him to the true company he kept"—to the circle of friends in the prewar years, with their short-lived and contradictory romantic ideals—will provide the only justification now possible for attending to him. In other words, his poetic value (which derived more from the person than the poet, in any case) has ceased to exist. What remains for Delany are the symptoms Brooke shared with the young people nicknamed the "Neo-pagans" by an older, slightly bemused Virginia Woolf, symptoms of a late-Edwardian malaise masking as optimism and love of self and youth.

The troubles—and failings—of Rupert and his friends were in evidence some time before the eventful summer of 1914. As a matter of fact, Rupert thought the war might actually solve all their problems by giving them an unexpected chance to "renew" the hopes that, from his standpoint at least, had long since faded. It is the story of those too easily lost hopes that Paul Delany has elected to tell, in sympathy laced with criticism, with sadness as well as finger-pointing, and with a view to examining in considerable detail the imperfect world that produced a correspondingly flawed Rupert Brooke. Whether Rupert can survive being turned from marble back into flesh after

1 *The Neo-Pagans: Rupert Brooke and the Ordeal of Youth*, by Paul Delany; The Free Press, 270 pages, $24.95.

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three-quarters of a century is a question worth asking.

We all know how extraordinary were the circumstances that made him a national hero in the first place, if not a British institution, and how definitive as well as quick was the solution the war provided for Rupert himself. He died of blood-poisoning in April 1915 (on the 23rd, no less, Shakespeare's birth and death date) on board one of the ships in the Aegean bound for the Dardanelles. As if to ensure his connection with the English romantic poets, he was buried in an olive grove on a nearby Greek island, thus completing the process begun three weeks earlier, in London's St. Paul's Cathedral. There, in his Easter sermon, Dean Inge had quoted from one of Rupert Brooke's not-yet-famous war sonnets, "The Soldier," which opened with the lines, "If I should die, think only this of me:/That there's some corner of a foreign field/That is forever England. . . ." Printed in full in the next day's *Times*, such a poem at such a time could only render inviolable for the duration of the war the handsome young man who wrote it—and who would not come home.

The inviolability lasted much longer than that, despite the complete reversal of attitude toward the war on the part of the poets of the Somme and Passchendaele, whose experience was far more direct than Rupert Brooke's. Although his sentiments about the loftiness of soldiering fell into disrepute, he himself did not, protected—it would seem—by general consensus as well as by his close friends. Delany tells us that when Rupert died, and for some time after, his Neo-pagan intimates kept "quiet about what they knew" of "the real Rupert behind the mask," the unpleasant and difficult Rupert as opposed to the golden-haired charmer, preferring to leave the public image to its promoters—or perhaps admitting by their silence that the promotion would not have displeased him. They knew, after all, how assiduous an image-builder he had been since the early days of his Cambridge theatricals and how he liked to play on different stages. Just a few months before going off to war, for example, he had posed in suggestive array of his own devising for the American photographer Sherril Schell, the profile and open shirt unmistakably calling up the famous Phillips portrait of Byron. Brooke's friends called it "your favorite actress," but Schell's photograph became the frontispiece to the posthumously published *1914 and Other Poems*. It was also used for the medallion on the memorial plaque in Rugby Chapel, where beneath the now-familiar profile one can read the equally familiar text of "The Soldier." Brooke would hardly have minded being there, brought back—as it were—to his birthplace. In fact, Delany reports, with a touch of awe, that Rupert once pointed to the actual spot, the bare wall beside the memorial to Arthur Hugh Clough, and remarked, "They are keeping that for *me*." Surely no one—Neo-pagan or not—can tell us what Rupert Brooke meant by those words or by other similar references to himself. For his tone—like his coloring and the texture of his skin—is not to be recovered.

Slightly more recoverable, but within distinct limits, it seems to me, are the young people who consorted with Rupert during the half-dozen or so years (from about 1906-1912) treated in the main body of Delany's book. He has pieced together their lives with great skill and patience from a variety of source materials, including records, letters, published and unpublished memoirs, and interviews with surviving "fringe" members of the group, in order to concentrate on the personal relations of these well-connected sons and daughters of the middle class. Though Delany sketches in the social and educational background of the group, providing in the process some fascinating information abut British institutions (both ancient and modern) and class behavior, his focus is mainly on the interaction among individuals. A risky business this, charting the emotional twists and turns in young volatile lives caught—as Delany points out—between the irresistible appeal of emancipation and the safety of orthodoxy. It involves

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him in a microscopic detailing of fluctuating moods and shifting attitudes that yields small reward precisely because they do not last and so little comes of them.

Yet this vacillation makes the Neo-pagans all the more symptomatic for Delany of the failure of their world to supply the proper nourishment. Attractive and promising as Rupert's friends were in their high-spirited twenties, the future held for most of them failure, serious illness, early death, as Delany tells us in his chastening epilogue that ends with the spectral figure of Adolf Hitler. It is 1933 and Hitler has just become Chancellor of Germany. In that year, on the first of May, the Neo-pagans were supposed to meet at Basel station, by an agreement reached back in 1909. Rupert's plan was for the group to give themselves what he called the "Organized Chance of Living Again" before middle age and greyness took over. In Delany's own words, it meant they could "turn their backs on England [and] start a new life." But by 1933 there were few Neo-pagans left even to register the emergence in Germany of "another romantic idealist of their generation."

Delany notes inconclusively the similarities as well as the differences between the "prewar German youth movement" and Neo-paganism, with its own conviction of specialness and superiority. But this is scarcely the message of his book, which seems embodied instead in the lives—as culture's signature—of a set of mostly undistinguished individuals for whom Delany feels both tenderness and disdain. Tenderness for the freshness and hopefulness of these charming "dew-dabblers," and disdain for their "escapist" bent and the privileges that encouraged it.

Along with Rupert, the Olivier girls made up the core of the Neo-pagans. They were the four popular daughters of the patrician-looking Sir Sidney Olivier, founding Fabian, friend of Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells, twice Governor-General of Jamaica, who raised them in a rural and enlightened atmosphere that was the envy of their companions, especially Rupert Brooke, who felt

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the eye of his watchful puritanic mother always upon him. Although the Olivier girls were left to look after themselves for long periods, when both their parents were in Jamaica, this scarcely altered their behavior, which was a curious, not unfamiliar mixture of the conventional and the unconventional. They believed in beautiful bodies, roaming the woods, bathing in the nude, but reserving sex for marriage. Not surprisingly, scores of young men besides Rupert fell hopelessly in love with them. Rupert's own principal attachment, one of his several unresolved and frustrating entanglements, was to the youngest girl, Noel, who managed to make a reasonable success of her life—she became a pediatrician—and resolutely refused to give up the letters Rupert wrote to her from the time she was fifteen. They remain, even now, by the terms of her will, exclusively in her family's hands, but it is hard to believe there are any surprises in them, considering the comparable letters that have lately come to light.

The other members of the central group, as Delany presents it, were Katherine (Ka) Cox, also very much on her own, due to family circumstances; two Darwin cousins, Gwen and Frances; Jacques Raverat, sent from France for a progressive education and married to Gwen Darwin in 1911; and Justin Brooke (unrelated to Rupert), who was a moneyed son of the Brooke Bond Tea fortune. They came together in various ways—through the trendy co-educational school (Bedales) some of them attended, through Newnham College and Cambridge University, and through the Fabian Society, which at the time (1906-08) was actively recruiting young people, Rupert and Ka Cox among them. As one might expect in such a group in the heyday of British Liberalism, social causes and reform blended with on-again, off-again love affairs that usually stopped short of the real thing—small fires generating lots of heat, among the "fringe" members as well. These included Geoffrey Keynes, who had been at prep school with Rupert; James Strachey, at Rugby and Cambridge with him; and David Garnett, whose parents, Edward and Constance, brought him up in the same setting as the Olivier girls but with considerably more success: he actually lived to a ripe and productive old age, whereas Margery Olivier, the most intellectual of the sisters, had to be institutionalized and Brynhild, the most beautiful, died of an incurable, disfiguring disease; a fourth sister, Daphne, took up Rudolf Steiner's educational philosophy for a time and then settled down to domestic life.

Among the Neo-pagans, moreover, only Rupert and the Raverats had what might be called aspirations. Indeed, Gwen Raverat's woodcuts would eventually earn her a modest praise. Rupert's first volume of *Poems* (1911), on the other hand, achieved some notoriety for its then daring mixture of levels of diction. Lovers throwing up on Channel crossings aroused the ire of several reviewers, providing Rupert with the opportunity to feel very modern. He had also been serving as the Neo-pagans' principal conduit for the various social and literary groups that mingled and competed with each other in these prewar years. Some of the Neo-pagans, however, were distrustful of the lives he led outside their purview—among his *Westminster Gazette* or Cambridge Apostle friends, for instance, or in the high-society world of the many-faceted Edward Marsh, promoter of Georgian poetry. It was Marsh, as Winston Churchill's Private Secretary, who obtained for Rupert his commission in the Royal Naval Division early in the war. And it was Marsh who would compose the first white-gloved memoir of the dead poet, thereby setting off an immediate tug-of-war between him and Rupert's mother as well as the long-lasting campaign, on the part of Brooke's literary trustees and biographers, to preserve for him his hero's status.

The Neo-pagans may have been largely amused by Mrs. Brooke's quarrel with Marsh, since the two were equally bent, in their variously genteel ways, on protecting Rupert; and they may have been uninformed about a few of his other interests; but they

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knew only too well what had gone wrong for him in the last three years of his life. This does not mean, however, that *we* can know the "truth" about the infamous reading-party episode at Lulworth on which every biography of Rupert Brooke has foundered. No matter how much new information is made available, the events that contributed to the disastrous Christmas of 1912, spelling the end of Neo-paganism so far as Paul Delany is concerned, remain almost entirely obscure. It seems impossible to tell what happened to Rupert before he met his Cambridge friends on the Dorset coast and went to pieces, yet everyone agrees that drastic changes in him occurred as a result. While the Lulworth outlines, in a manner of speaking, are fairly clear, the multiple causes and effects are not. All those present—James and Lytton Strachey, Maynard Keynes, the painter Henry Lamb, and Ka Cox—were surprised by Rupert's hysterical behavior. Newly convinced that he loved not Noel Olivier but Ka Cox (who was convinced that *she* loved Henry Lamb), he was also convinced that Lytton Strachey, who loved Henry Lamb, was somehow responsible for Henry Lamb's flirtation with Ka Cox. Wild accusations and denunciations followed in due course. Whatever it was that Rupert suffered here, whether a complete breakdown (from which some of his friends thought he never recovered), or a paranoid seizure, or a violent emotional tantrum, it signaled not only his alarming instability but also the break-up of the Neo-pagan magic circle. In Delany's view, Rupert can be said to have lost his faith here (as well as his marbles?)—at least his faith in "the ideal of a life based on friendship"—and to have been born again just two years later, welcoming the war and thanking "God Who has matched us with His hour,/And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping. . . ."

The exalted Rupert Brooke of the five last sonnets, from whom there has been almost universal recoil, was an inevitability in Paul Delany's eyes. So was the nasty anti-Semitic Brooke, sounding in the letters he wrote

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after his breakdown like his friends the Raverats, who became aggressively moral and Christian as well. In other words, Rupert could hardly have turned out differently, given his cultural genes, which account for the Neo-pagans' selective and temporary flouting of convention, their half-hearted flirtation with socialist-liberal movements, their frantic self-involvement and fear of growing old, and their ultimate failure to come to terms with the modern world. Delany sometimes seems even to be saying that the real villain, the enemy, if you will, of youth and wholeness and genuine independence was England itself, though he admits that Bloomsbury fared better under similar conditions.

Scarcely a novel hypothesis—to blame sexual torments, middle-class snobberies, and public-school chauvinism on the lingering legacy of Victorianism. But as it happens the restless Rupert Brooke, treated by doctors who could only prescribe food and rest for him, left England in 1913 primarily to escape from the psycho-sexual Lulworth imbroglio of 1912 that, with his own ingrained disapproval of premarital sex and his acquired distaste for his disapproval, he could not handle. He stayed away for a year, travelling across the United States and recording his impressions for the *Westminster Gazette*, which became the posthumously published *Letters from America* with its splendid wide-ranging preface by Henry James in his late grand style. (The young poet and the old novelist had met through the offices of Edward Marsh, who asked James to write the preface; it turned out to be James's own last finished work.) And, before returning home, Rupert went to the South Seas where it is too tempting to say he experienced something of the old paganism, but Delany says it anyway—understandably, since one of Rupert's most endearing poems, "Tiare Tahiti," came out of his brief happy liaison with a native girl.

But the personal strains on him were obvious: the sexual tensions and his apparent inability to resolve them on home ground. Such strains belong to adolescence, which, like Victorianism, has a remarkable staying power, though Rupert Brooke may have set something of a record. Sensibly enough, Delany minimizes the homoerotic tendency all-too-common in the period, seeing it as a negligible element in Brooke's make-up. But he is also overly tolerant of prolonged adolescence and perhaps places more blame for it than is warranted on the cultural stresses endured by Brooke and his "privileged" friends, and on the traditions that prevented the "truth" about them from being known until now. Delany waxes bitter, for example, about Sir Geoffrey Keynes, Brooke's senior Literary Trustee when he began his own book, and he goes out of his way to point up the omitted passages in the letters Keynes chose to include as well as some relatively minor errors in Hassall's biography, dominated, as Delany sees it, by a tyrannical Keynes. Both Keynes and Hassall come remarkably close to representing for Delany the British Establishment that closed ranks to guard Rupert Brooke's image from any defiling facts. If Rupert was "by far the most wonderful person [Keynes had] ever known," as he told Delany, then it stands to reason that Keynes had been protecting *himself*—and by extension his kind—as much as Rupert Brooke.

Delany may be right about this, but the "truth-telling" he engages in can cause its own problems. If held to the high standard he sets for others, then he must be faulted for sometimes nodding himself, for quoting—as an example—from a number of Rupert's letters and failing to identify in each case the person to whom he was writing (citing only the page number in Keynes's *Letters*). The recipient makes a difference, as Delany ought to know, given the "jester and poseur" he describes so painstakingly, not to mention the mimic and the ventriloquist he may not fully appreciate. Yet he also slightly misquotes Rupert on occasion, in order to shift the emphasis to suit his authorial point. And he is asking for trouble by quoting from Gwen Raverat's fictional memoir as though it were documentary fact, once even changing her characters' names to those of her models.

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My own point is that "truth" begins to seem a more dangerous commodity than ever, pursued at all cost. In the pursuit of Rupert Brooke, it becomes positively perilous—amounting to a romantic ideal to match his own or the Neo-pagans' contradictory ones. This is how looking for the "real" Rupert might well be regarded, with the supreme penalty being the discovery that there was no such thing, indeed that this was precisely the knowledge about himself he resisted nearly all his life, just as he resisted the natural shedding of youth. Unable to settle on either the right girl or the right tone, he was certainly not ready for the dissonances of the modernism that was everywhere around him. In fact, Paul Delany's brave and quixotic narrative may tell us, perhaps more than anything else, that not even *his* salvaging operation, performed with such skill, could hope to succeed: the patient is not simply dead but obsolete.

The collecting life

Frances Weitzenhoffer The Havemeyers: Impressionism Comes to America. Abrams, 288 pages, $37.50

reviewed by Denys Sutton

The history of American taste is a fascinating subject which is only now receiving the attention it properly deserves: added stimulus to unraveling the skeins comes from the realization that in many respects American collectors and patrons were pioneers in their appreciation of modern art. Some indication of this rapid response to contemporary movements is provided by the experiences in Paris of the American painters John Trumbull and John Vanderlyn, both of whom knew Jacques-Louis David.

The American relationship with France has been a long and fruitful one and, as barely requires mentioning, increased during the war with England when the young Republic was allied with France. This is an alliance symbolized by Houdon's famous statue of George Washington. The love of French art was also reflected in the furniture acquired by Gouverneur Morris and Colonel Swan, and it is one that has continued over the years, reaching its apogee, it might be said, in the Paris of Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald and in the avant-garde collections of the 1930s.

Good Bostonians, when they die, go to Paris, said one wag, T. G. Appleton, and this was certainly the belief of many of those who went in for art. Although German painting found admirers in nineteenth-century America, and Charles Eliot Norton patronized Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the amount of art bought in the French capital by transatlantic collectors was enormous—Salon pictures and Barbizon landscapes poured into America during the 1860s and 1870s. W. H. Vanderbilt, August Belmont, and A. T. Stewart were just a few of the enthusiasts. That some collectors could change their opinions when taste veered in other directions is one of the conclusions that emerges from Frances Weitzenhoffer's rewarding book, *The Havemeyers,* which is correctly subtitled *Impressionism Comes to America.* This study, which will please both the specialist and the general reader, also provides material for the social and economic historian.

Of all American collectors, the Havemeyers are among the best known, largely on account of their munificent gifts to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Both had their own, individual tastes and both came to collecting independently of the other.

Louisine Elder was one of those strong-minded American girls who found their way to Paris in the 1870s to perfect their French. She attended a sort of finishing school kept by Madame de Sartre. Fortunately one of her fellow boarders was Emily Sartain, a young Philadelphian studying painting. She introduced her friend Mary Cassatt to Louisine, who thus had the chance of getting to know this formidable and intelligent artist. As almost goes without saying, she was profoundly influenced by her.

It was Mary Cassatt, as Mrs. Weitzen-

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hoffer shows, who planted the seeds of collecting in Louisine's mind, and at the age of twenty Louisine had the distinction of being the first American buyer of a work by Degas, acquiring his *Ballet Rehearsal,* a pastel and gouache over monotype, now in the Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas City. That she swiftly developed her own taste is revealed, too, by her acquisition of a Monet, a Pissarro, and a Mary Cassatt. J. J. Henner's portrait of Louisine and the various photographs illustrated in the book reveal her possession of the sort of self-assurance that was likely to appeal to her future husband, Henry Osborne Havemeyer.

When Louisine married Havemeyer she was twenty-eight; he was thirty-five. They had known each other since childhood, but he had first married her aunt, from whom he was now divorced. He had previously had a drinking problem, but Louisine made it a condition of their marriage that he would have to abstain. He did so for the rest of his life. The somewhat unusual circumstances of their marriage led to the Havemeyers concentrating on their collection.

Harry Havemeyer, who was a sugar magnate, had already taken an interest in art before his second marriage, visiting, with Samuel Colman, the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876, where he saw and appreciated Chinese and Japanese works of art, becoming especially keen on the latter. In keeping with contemporary taste, he also admired Corot and the Barbizon painters, lending several of his works to the famous New York "Pedestal Exhibition" of 1883 at the National Academy of Design.

Mrs. Weitzenhoffer tells her tale skillfully and places the Havemeyers against the background of the time, one when the gallery owner Paul Durand-Ruel was opening up the American market, all the more vital for him in view of his lack of clients in Europe. The details that are supplied about the early days of Americans collecting Impressionist paintings are intriguing, and much of the information has been virtually unknown. We are given an account of James F. Sutton—co-founder of the American Art Association—arranging a French show which ran into considerable difficulties, not least on account of the problems relating to the import duty on paintings.

It was an exhibition organized by Durand-Ruel and Sutton at the National Academy of Design in May 1886 that led Havemeyer to become a buyer of modern French painting: Mrs. Havemeyer had asked him to purchase a work by Manet if one was available, and he secured *The Salmon* of 1876, now in the Shelburne Museum in Vermont. During this period Havemeyer bought two major pictures by Rembrandt, which he offered to lend to the Metropolitan Museum, and a Delacroix. He was usually generous about showing or lending his possessions, but he was never invited to join the board of the Metropolitan. Mrs. Weitzenhoffer suggests, doubtless correctly, that this was due to the fact that Harry Havemeyer, who was the driving force behind the Sugar Trust, had several encounters with the federal authorities. In May 1897 he was charged with contempt of court "because he had refused to answer the questions of a U.S. Senate investigating committee about the exact amounts his company had donated to national and state political campaigns in 1892 and 1893." Among the lawyers who acted for Havemeyer on this and other occasions was J. G. Johnson, the most celebrated corporate lawyer of his day and a notable collector. Earlier, when Johnson had successfully defended the Sugar Trust against the charge of being a monopoly, he asked his client for only $3,000, but there was a catch: he also wanted a painting from his collection. Much annoyed, Havemeyer refused to agree to the deal, but paid him $100,000. Havemeyer's various legal battles continued until the end of his life.

The Havemeyers were not only omnivorous collectors of art; they were also patrons of Tiffany, who was responsible for much of the interior of their mansion at 1 East Sixty-sixth Street, which, like most grand residences from this period, has now vanished. However, some of the colorful glass decora-

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Sculpture from Surrealism

Arp, Bourgeois, Ernst,
Ferber, Hare, Miró, Noguchi

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tions with peacocks that Tiffany designed as a mosaic in the entrance hall have survived and were included in last year's exhibition, "In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement" at the Metropolitan Museum. The author provides a full account of the imaginative patronage of the Havemeyers in building their house, but both the house and the collection failed to win the approval of Berenson and his wife on their visit there in November 1903. The Havemeyers also owned country properties.

A careful examination of the facts permits Mrs. Weitzenhoffer to chart the development and range of the Havemeyers' taste. Harry Havemeyer was a great lover of Dutch seventeenth-century painting, which led to his acquisition of notable works by Hals as well as Rembrandt. It is amusing to find that he was eager to persuade his circle to accept the French School, being particularly keen to convert his crony Colonel Oliver Payne. Although the Colonel was a confirmed bachelor, Havemeyer felt that, being susceptible to the charms of pretty women, he would appreciate "feminine subjects by a modern artist such as Corot." Colonel Payne was to acquire not only a Corot but a superb Degas, *The Dance,* which (he confessed to Mrs. Havemeyer after her husband's death) he never appreciated.

The gentle conspiracy to persuade the Colonel to buy modern art was abetted by Mary Cassatt, who suggested that he should call on the services of Sara Tyson Hallowell. This enterprising woman had helped Potter Palmer with his collection and had acted as secretary to the Interstate Industrial Exposition's art committee in Chicago. In 1890 she borrowed eleven Impressionist paintings from Durand-Ruel for the annual show. She also played an important part in guiding the Potter Palmers around the Paris dealers and in organizing the exhibition of foreign masterpieces for Chicago's World Columbian Exposition of 1893, which was relatively successful.

In 1893 Sara Hallowell, who could step out of the pages of a novel by Henry James, had decided to reside permanently in France,

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where she acted as the agent for American museums, supplementing her clearly exiguous income by journalism. Mrs. Weitzenhoffer prints a touching letter from Miss Hallowell to Durand-Ruel asking if she could work for the firm: she suggested that this dealer might pay for her to live in a pension, or in a small apartment, but Durand-Ruel was unable to do so. This letter sheds light on the position of the independent woman in the art world and underlines the fact that such women were able to strike out on their own. Her later life is not dealt with in this book; however, her career would be well worth studying in detail.

When the Havemeyers came to Europe, they would meet Mary Cassatt and travel with her. They visited Paris in 1901, when Harry Havemeyer was in need of a rest after a fierce fight with John Arbuckle, who controlled the market in packaged coffee and who had moved into sugar refining. After this struggle, which cost the two tycoons twenty-five million dollars, they reached an agreement.

There was one unfortunate consequence of the Havemeyers' trip: Mary Cassatt had introduced them to A. E. Harmisch, an artist who had taken up art dealing and who became their agent in Italy. Mary Cassatt swore by his honesty. Harmisch may have been honest, but he had no eye, and the bulk of the paintings he secured for his patrons are not by the artists to whom they are attributed: one exception is Veronese's *Boy with a Greyhound,* now in the Metropolitan.

The Havemeyers were on safer ground when they fell in love with Spanish paintings. Havemeyer was stunned by El Greco's *Burial of Count Orgaz* at Toledo, and one of his finest acquisitions was this master's portrait of Cardinal Don Fernando Niño de Guevara; he also secured Goya's *Majas on a Balcony.* (Both paintings are now in the Metropolitan Museum.) The correspondence relating to their transactions in Spain is interesting; at one stage they used as their intermediary Joseph Wicht, who was on excellent terms with the Spanish aristocracy, but he died young. We learn, too, that Durand-Ruel's Spanish agent was Ricardo de Madrazo.

That Harry Havemeyer had the gift of getting to the heart of the matter is shown by the instructions he regularly issued concerning his purchases, even as he was expanding his commercial empire, acquiring large tracts of land with copper mines in Alaska.

Another instance of his sharp eye was that he spotted the talents of Ambroise Vollard as an art dealer. He helped Vollard financially in about 1900, and purchased pictures by Cézanne from him. After her husband's death, Mrs. Havemeyer disposed of two of her Cézannes to Durand-Ruel, who sold them to Morozov, the Russian collector. Havemeyer had his preferences and dislikes; he was averse to buying nudes—his wife had no such inhibition—and thus he declined to buy Ingres's *Le Bain Turc,* which had been suggested to them by Mary Cassatt as a possible acquisition. (She had heard that the owner, Prince Amédée de Broglie, needed money.)

After Harry Havemeyer's death in December 1907 at the age of sixty, his widow was disconsolate and her sorrow was compounded by the relentless attacks of the press on the family for its alleged misdemeanors with the Sugar Trust. Much litigation and expense was incurred, but finally a settlement was reached. This took place when Mrs. Havemeyer and her daughter Electra went abroad to France and Spain. Electra had inherited her parents' love of art, and in writing to her preferred beau (and future husband), J. Watson Webb, she observed that nobody would buy jewels when they could buy works of art.

Although Mrs. Havemeyer missed securing El Greco's *Saint Martin and the Beggar,* which went to another emerging American collector, Peter A. B. Widener, she regained something of her pleasure in existence by looking at works of art. Some indication of the sort of life she and her daughter led in Paris is provided by one of Electra's letters

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to Watson Webb. "I had," she wrote, "such an interesting time yesterday. We went to the house of Madame Cassin, the wealthiest courtisane in France, and I met the lady myself. She owns a tremendous house on the Champs Elysées near the Arc de Triomphe as large as the Astoria hotel. She had this marvellous collection of pictures. She is about 70 years old now. Such luxury you have never seen." It would be intriguing to learn more about this collector and about the sort of pictures that she owned.

Mrs. Havemeyer was a determined old lady and soon turned her mind to her collection. She let it be known that she was still in the market: her interests had broadened to include Gothic sculpture (then a growing fashion), Persian pottery, and antiquities. She took pleasure in showing her collection to such visiting dignitaries as Dr. Ludwig Justi of Berlin, who spoke about it in suitably gracious terms in *The New York Times.*

During her later years she evinced a special affection for the works of Courbet and of course Degas, and managed to secure masterpieces such as El Greco's celebrated *View of Toledo* and Daumier's *Third-Class Carriage,* now both in the Metropolitan Museum.

Active to the end, Mrs. Havemeyer played a large role in the suffragette movement in the United States, even getting herself arrested in Washington, D.C., much to the consternation of her family. Her charm and good humor were as evident as her energy, which she put to good use during the First World War. Mrs. Weitzenhoffer sketches the last years deftly, but she does not pay sufficient tribute to Mrs. Havemeyer's memoirs, which have much to recommend them.

The story of the Havemeyer family is no less intriguing than the formation of the collection, and at times it would provide material for "society" novelists such as Edith Wharton or Louis Auchincloss. On one occasion Mrs. Havemeyer and Mrs. Watson Webb, Sr. took a hand in decorating the house which Electra, who had inherited $4,000,000 from her father, and her husband (whose mother was a Vanderbilt) had built on Long Island. Mrs. Havemeyer commissioned Tiffany and Co. to create Moorish-style pieces to go with the dining room, which was made up of elements from a villa built for Charles V of Spain near Granada. Poor Electra's mother-in-law introduced stuffed elks' heads and large, uncomfortable chairs. On another occasion, after Mrs. Havemeyer's brief incarceration in Washington, one of her sons-in-law, Peter Frelinghuysen, refused to receive the "jailbird," who had to wait in the car outside his house in Morristown.

The Havemeyers cared little about social life, only entering the grand world when they felt obliged to launch their daughters, which was done in suitable style. Their true love was art, and a memorial to their taste and enthusiasm remains in their collection. Harry Havemeyer's instinctive response to quality may be observed in his appreciation of Islamic pottery, which he saw at Kelekian's shops in Paris and New York.

One telling description of the Havemeyers occurs in a letter written by Charles L. Freer to his friend Charles Morse after they had visited Freer in Detroit in September 1906 and been shown selections from his collection—a Chinese painting, a Japanese screen, "an ancient piece of pottery," and a Whistler *Nocturne.* He told Morse: "Mrs. Havemeyer's taste is most exquisite, and, of course, her long attention to artistic matters has equipped her more thoroughly for the enjoyment of fine Oriental things than any other lady I have ever known. Mr. Havemeyer is an extraordinary man. No one can be more deeply touched by beauty than he, provided, he is in a mood to enjoy it. He told me that there are times in his life when he cannot disengage himself from most active material things; then there are periods when music seems the only thing in life, and again times when other fine arts are his sole desire." This just tribute to their sensibilities firmly places the Havemeyers within the aesthetic movement which reigned in the United States and elsewhere at this time.

It is a striking fact about collectors like the Havemeyers that most, if not all, of their

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possessions were made available to the public and this at a time when fiscal benefits were not involved. The aesthetes, whether collectors, patrons, or designers, by familiarizing the public with a wide range of artistic styles—Oriental and Islamic as well as Western—did much to ensure that eclectic and open-minded attitude to the arts which is a predominant feature of American civilization.

Old, new, buried, blue

Henrietta Garnett Family Skeletons. Knopf, 213 pages, $15.95

reviewed by Donna Rifkind

"Why, when October comes round," Virginia Woolf famously complained in her essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," "do the publishers always fail to supply us with a masterpiece?" Of the incompetent writers of her day, she went on to remark, "their sincerity is desperate, and their courage tremendous; it is only that they do not know which to use, a fork or their fingers." One might wonder if Mrs. Woolf would be surprised today to observe how grimly durable her complaints have proved; they are certainly no less pertinent now, and may even be pointed, ironically, toward this first attempt at fiction by her own great-niece, Henrietta Garnett.

Family Skeletons has three settings, all isolated and all travelogue-beautiful: an estate in Ireland called Malabay, a vaguely Swiss mountain clinic, and an island. The book supplies slightly more characters than settings: all are either beautiful or charmingly eccentric. There is Catherine (beautiful), who has lived her seventeen years in wild innocence at Malabay with her horses and her uncle Pake (eccentric). There is her cousin Tara, ten years older than she. ("Tara was beautiful. He was not just good looking, but beautiful.") Tara has a real zest for living; he tends to say things like "The parsley is perfection" and "I've had more lovers than you've had hot dinners." He marries Catherine and then promptly gets himself drowned in the same lake where Catherine's parents, Nellie and Terence, died in a sailing accident many years before. Tara's friend Gerald, whose "good looks were not quite so obvious," falls in love with Catherine and rescues her from the clinic where she has been recovering—not just from Tara's death, but from an additional nuisance: political bullies from the town near Malabay have bombed the estate to pieces, killing Uncle Pake and destroying the only home she has known.

Gerald takes Catherine to his island, where he is writing the screenplay for his best-selling novel, which is based on Tara's brief life. Pake's wise old ex-wife, Poppy (eccentric), shows up randomly at the clinic and on the island, always armed with plenty of champagne, and says things like "Every time someone I love dies, part of me dies too." On the island, Gerald coerces Catherine into becoming a writer ("In order for us to be together," he tells her, "it's essential that you should write"), and she presents him with a play which intuitively guesses at a secret—confirmed by Poppy—involving Catherine's parents. It turns out that their sailing accident was actually both a suicide and a murder: Terence had killed his wife and himself because he could not bear the knowledge that Catherine is not his daughter but the child of the incestuous union between Nellie and her brother, Pake.

Catherine, who is not nearly as disturbed by this news as one would think, inexplicably decides to go off to Copenhagen to pursue her writing; Gerald leaves the island also, to shoot his movie. They promise to reunite at Gerald's cottage (isolated, beautiful) near Oxford, and the book ends.

If this seems a spare, inadequate summary, it is because the novel is exactly this inadequate. It reaches for a tinkling, magical quality, like that of a finely crafted fable, full of swans, airy twilights, and champagne. But all this ethereality is merely a device that allows the author to divert her attention from the rigors of characterization, from

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working to make fictional people seem real. Henrietta Garnett's heroes and heroines are not really characters at all; they are skeletal structures without muscles or blood or breath, and they move only according to their author's all-too-obvious and none-too-skillful whim. Often in the novel Henrietta Garnett tells facts about her characters that would be better displayed through the book's action, as in this bit of information about Gerald and Poppy: "They knew each other very well. Glance and gesture were as eloquent a means of communication as direct speech and cross reference." When the characters *are* propelled into action by the author, they act with a quivering triviality, amid a few awkwardly chosen dress-up details.

There can be little doubt that the faults of this book—its preciosity, its clichés, its creaky characterizations—are by far more abundant than those found in the general run of first novels. Yet to be harsh about it is to be completely beside the point, for two reasons. First, I think it is likely that this book would not have been published if its author were not Henrietta Garnett. The name Garnett drags along behind it all the associations with Bloomsbury that the reading public continues to find irresistibly interesting, and it flirtatiously dares that public to look for hints of the real-life Bloomsbury story within the pages of this novel. Add to this the fact that the book's dust-jacket painting was executed by Julian Bell (Quentin Bell's son and Henrietta's first cousin), give the book a suggestive title, and you have packaging which the publishers cannot but be pleased with, almost regardless of what is printed inside. One imagines that Gollancz (the novel's British publishers) and Knopf might just as easily have wrapped kippers in a dust jacket printed with an Omega Workshop pattern, slapped a name like Strachey or Partridge on it, and put it in the bookstores with equal satisfaction.

Second, given Henrietta Garnett's family history, it cannot have been easy for her to have written anything at all, and what she has managed to write is just about exactly what one would expect. She is the second of the four daughters of Angelica and David ("Bunny") Garnett, one of the most famously absurd unions of this century. Angelica is the illegitimate daughter of the painter Vanessa Bell (Virginia Woolf's sister) and her homosexual lover, Duncan Grant. Apparently Angelica was led to believe that Clive Bell was her real father until Vanessa finally told the girl the truth when she was seventeen. Bunny Garnett, a former lover of Duncan's, announced upon Angelica's birth that he intended to marry her, and twenty-two years later he actually did so, causing Vanessa and Duncan to cluck, ridiculously, like shocked Victorian aunts. Angelica has movingly recorded her bizarre childhood and marriage in a pain-filled memoir entitled *Deceived With Kindness* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985). In it, she explains that she felt so smothered by the "monolithic" Vanessa, and was kept so ignorant of the goings-on both in Bloomsbury and in the world outside it, that she felt her only choices were to model herself after Venessa and to succumb to the perverse attentions of Bunny.

It does not seem farfetched to conclude that Henrietta, seeing that everyone in her family painted or wrote or wrote about painting, felt compelled herself to write a novel, and one supposes that she was also encouraged to do so by the Bloomsbury-watchers who have made the history and lore of the Woolf-Bell-Strachey clique into something of a cottage industry. Writing this novel was clearly a brave enterprise for Henrietta, given the amount of attention lavished on the fiction of her great-aunt Virginia and on other members of the group. It was also a courageous act to try to invent a story able to spark anywhere near the kind of interest that her true family history has inspired for various biographers, historians, and amateur inquiring minds.

Courageous as Henrietta's attempt was, though, it was almost certain to fail from the outset through the very nature of the author's famous family name. What is this

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novel's incest, drowning, murder, sadness, and isolation in comparison with the sexual irregularity, suicides, and theatricality of real-life Bloomsbury? It is no wonder that fictional Catherine digested the news of her unnatural birth without missing a beat; such information could not be especially shocking to Catherine's inventor, who clearly had trouble instilling her characters with anything other than her own imperturbable attitude. A novel like *Family Skeletons*, in failing to command any degree of fascination, is at least in this way related to the artistic Bloomsbury enterprise as a whole: the way Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, Virginia Woolf, *et alia* lived their lives is much more interesting than any art they managed to produce. It is not at all surprising that Henrietta Garnett's third-generation novel, like the results of inbreeding, is the fragile specimen that it is.

In her biography *Vanessa Bell* (Ticknor and Fields, 1983), Frances Spalding quotes the following recollection by Henrietta Garnett:

> Amaryllis [her older sister] and I were sometimes allowed to stay up for dinner instead of being given an early supper. On these occasions we both paraded in extravagant and fantastic evening dress concocted from curtains, lengths of Omega cloth, Vanessa's nightdresses, feathers, flowers and finery borrowed from her jewel boxes. Then we pretended that we were grand ladies . . . . We flirted outrageously with Duncan and with Clive. On one occasion we went so far as to have a double wedding. Amaryllis married Clive, I married Duncan . . . . Nessa officiated as high priestess. Then we all had tea.

This little reminiscence captures perfectly the dress-up quality of much that we read about Bloomsbury. The individuals involved seemed much of the time to be staging an elaborate play, making up their interacting roles as they went along. Whether or not this masquerade atmosphere actually existed—no doubt these individuals would strongly deny that it did—it exists overwhelmingly in Henrietta Garnett's novel; in fact, the book may be said to be constructed almost entirely on feathers, flowers, finery, playacting, and buried ancestral secrets that thinly mimic the author's own family skeletons. This attraction to the masquerade appears to be the only inheritance this daughter of Bloomsbury has received.

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Notebook

Black Mountain comes to Bard

by Robert Richman

Rifle man of the reminiscences of the race and you enslave him.
—Edward Dahlberg in *Can These Bones Live*

From June 26-28, a conference on "Poetry at Black Mountain College: The Emergence of an American School of Poetics" was held at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson. Organized by the college's Edith C. Blum Art Institute in conjunction with its fine exhibition "The Arts at Black Mountain College,"[1] the conference consisted of seven sessions devoted to topics such as "Precursors of Black Mountain Poetry: William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound" and "Is There a Black Mountain Poetry? An Open Forum," as well as readings by poets like Robert Kelly, Jonathan Williams, and Robert Creeley. Nearly all of the conference's twenty-six participants were affiliated with colleges or universities. In fact, ten of the speakers were associated—or once had been—with the State University of New York at Buffalo. The conference also featured a few cameo appearances by people who attended Black Mountain but managed to escape the academy. The star of this group was the popular novelist and journalist Francine du Plessix Gray.

To quote Michael Davidson, one of the conference participants, Black Mountain was "one of the greatest anti-institutions of the twentieth century." It was founded in 1933 by a group of dissenting Rollins College professors, and came to be seen as the premier example of progressive education in America, with an emphasis on creativity and the arts. As Mary Emma Harris reminds us in her catalogue of the exhibition, Black Mountain boasted a faculty that included—at one time or another—Joseph Albers, Merce Cunningham, Franz Kline, Buckminster Fuller, Eric Bentley, Clement Greenberg, and Elaine and Willem de Kooning, among others. Except for Albers, who was there sixteen years, most of the faculty members had only a brief relationship with the college. Yet this did nothing to diminish the sense of excitement that attended such a daring educational experiment. The experiment itself ended in 1957, when Black Mountain's last rector, the poet Charles Olson (1910-1970), closed the place and sold the property to pay off the college's debts.

Yet here at Bard were professors from around the nation soberly discussing the iconoclastic, "projectivist" verse that thrived at Black Mountain under Charles Olson and attempting to make that verse into so much academic mincemeat. The irony of this exercise was lost on many—one speaker admir-

1 "The Arts at Black Mountain College," organized by Mary Emma Harris, will be on view at the North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, North Carolina, until October 4, and at New York University's Grey Art Gallery from October 25 through December 19. A catalogue with the same name, written by Mary Emma Harris, has been published by the MIT Press (650 pages, $50).

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ingly recalled Olson's advice to the poet Cid Corman that he decline an affiliation with Brandeis University—but not on all. Stephen Rodefer wondered if Olson "might have avoided [the conference] like the plague."

Olson's poetry was as uncompromising as the man himself. Taking off from the poetic precepts of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, Olson conceived of verse as a kind of sponge, open to whatever impinged on the consciousness. The classic projectivist poem, as Robert Bertolf described it during one of the sessions, is a "democratic language-event" which lets in "all sorts of information." As Olson wrote in his essay on "Projective Verse" (which Williams printed in his 1950 autobiography), "ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION." Here is a randomly chosen page from Olson's unfinished, postmodern sequence *The Maximus Poems*[2]:

> Strod the water's edge & the
> land as though there were some reason to
> do such a thing not going away any further
> to have his eggs than a rail does
>
> [Monday June 23rd

Perhaps the most succinct definition of the projectivist impulse came from Robert Creeley, a disciple of Olson's at Black Mountain and the unofficial dean of the projectivists (he is now Gray Professor of Poetry and Letters at SUNY Buffalo). Dilating on Olson's ideas, he said, "Form is never more than an extension of content"—that is, the thing perceived dictates the manner of speech. As another speaker, Charles Stein, pointed out, keeping "things in their natural juxtapositions" allowed the Olsonians to dispose with what they deemed to be excess Eliotic baggage. This baggage included ideas, symbols, rhyme, meter, syntax, and irony—anything that revealed a mind seeking to transform scenes and landscapes for the purpose of form or meaning. (Irony was especially galling to the Olsonians. In David Perkins's *History of Modern Poetry,* he remarks that irony "assumes a dissatisfaction with the prevailing condition," and that any complaint about prevailing conditions was, for the projectivists, rank heresy.) Reality—or, in the jargon of these poets, the "event" and its "energy"—was sovereign. The ideal writer of this poetry was, in the words of another speaker, a "breather moving among facts"—devoid of ideas and identity, and usually cut off from the historical and cultural past.

This stress on unadulterated "facts" at the expense of everything else has lost much of the allure it had ten or twenty years ago. But even in the Sixties and Seventies, when projectivism came into vogue, it was never a very popular movement. The projectivists' wholesale rejection of ideas, subject matter, and the poetic ego, and the almost scientific attention they paid to syllables and "breath units," put them on the very margins of the poetic culture. So did their distortion, for their own ends, of the work of Pound and Williams. And so did their contention—heard more than once during the conference—that they have been the only true purveyors of an "American vernacular." The truth is, projectivist poetry is a specialty language that lives almost exclusively in colleges and graduate schools. And that, as Charles Olson would have been the first to maintain, is no life at all.

One of these academic outposts is Bard, where Robert Kelly, who studied privately with Olson in the Sixties, is professor of English. At the first session, on Friday evening, Kelly introduced Albert Cook, the man who invited Olson to SUNY Buffalo in 1963 when Cook was chairman of the English Department there. Cook's lecture was entitled "Projections of Measure: the Continued Synergies of Pound and Williams." Using phrases like "isochronic regularities" and "breath clusters," Cook sought to trace

2 The complete sequence, edited by George F. Butterick, was published in 1983 by the University of California Press, who will also issue Olson's *Collected Poems* in November (609 pages, $45).

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the "evolution of a measure" in Pound and Williams and its supposed exploitation by other poets. To this end, he supplied the audience with copies of thirty-one poems ranging from Catullus to Lorine Niedecker. Probably the hardest "convergence" to accept of the many Cook advanced was that of Creeley and Robert Frost. The only interesting part of Cook's lecture was his reading of poems by Olson, Charles Reznikoff, and Louis Zukofsky. For this Cook adopted an "ordinary" American accent which sounded for all the world like the voice of a retarded person. Yet at the same time he emitted each syllable as if the previous one didn't exist, which lent his voice the cadence of one of those computer recordings that supply the phone number when you dial information. Perhaps this jarring fusion of naturalness and artificiality was an example of the "Poundian juxtaposition" Olson set such great store by. Whatever it was, it was a far cry from the "cadences of normal voice" Cook professed to respect in the poet's work.

The following session, on Saturday morning, was called "The Influence of Olson, Duncan, and Creeley." Unfortunately, none of the four speakers—Donald Byrd, Charles Stein, Robert Bertolf, or Michael Palmer—addressed the question of influence in any systematic way. This refusal to nail down particulars of influence no doubt derives from the conviction, as Byrd put it, that there is no "philosophy" behind Black Mountain poetry."It's hard to be an Olsonian," he declared, because "there are no principles" and the poetry "is in no sense aesthetic." Each speaker—except for Charles Stein, whose talk was comparatively jargon-free—endeavored to furnish his subject with a scientific aura. Byrd discussed Poincaré, the mathematician, at length, while Bertolf used locutions like "the organism arriving at articulation" (actually a phrase of Duncan's), which is the projectivists' way of saying "a speaking man." Why reducing human beings to "organisms" is permitted while the "clipped hedges and mowed lawns" of Eliot's formalist followers are not—the phrase is Michael Palmer's—remains a mystery.

Palmer did, however, make an interesting revelation during his talk, which consisted chiefly of readings from letters by Olson and Creeley. He related how Olson tried to break what he called the "elegiac strain" in Duncan's poetry. Since this strain is one of the saving graces of Duncan's verse, one can only be thankful Olson didn't succeed.

The third session, held on Saturday afternoon, was given over to reminiscences by writers who taught or studied at Black Mountain. The novelist and short-story writer Michael Rumaker remembered the freedom of the place, Francine du Plessix Gray recalled the "tradition of disobedience" she acquired there, and *Village Voice* columnist Joel Oppenheimer spoke of the communal style of life he was introduced to at the college: "We gave, we took, we shared," he said. He then offered a telling anecdote. Apparently while at Black Mountain, Oppenheimer read a poem to Olson containing the expression, "Rosa eats it." At first Olson mistook the phrase for Latin, which presumably would have meant an automatic demerit for Oppenheimer since the merest acknowledgement of a foreign culture went against Olson's principles. (To this day, projectivists refuse to pronounce the names of foreign authors correctly.) After Oppenheimer spelled out the phrase for his mentor, the older poet asked his student what it meant in *English*. Among other things, the episode demonstrates just how removed from the world was the man who claimed to be so attuned to it.

The highlight of the fourth session, given on Saturday evening and entitled "The Black Mountain Poets: Exchanges with Younger Poets," was a talk by Ed Sanders, who had delivered the annual Charles Olson Memorial Lecture at SUNY Buffalo in 1983. Sanders, former lead singer of The Fugs and author of *The Complete Sex Poems of Ed Sanders,* among other works, is the closest thing the projectivists have to a stand-up comic. He spoke of how Black Mountain, which he never attended, represented the "zen concept of the direct transmission of mind." But the place was not without flaws,

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he informed us. As good as the college was intellectually and spiritually, it offered none of its employees a dental plan or pension. "Albers didn't have a pension," Sanders lamented. Sanders pointed out that today's academic institutions continue to deny their professors satisfactory benefits. "Look around at the poets of America and you see a lot of bad teeth," he declared. Despite such drawbacks, however, Sanders advised the young members of the audience to "crawl through ossified puke to get to where the best minds of your generation are."

The first session on Sunday morning consisted of readings by "Four Later Black Mountain Poets": Donald Byrd, Duncan McNaughton, Thomas Meyer, and Charles Stein. The best reader—or, rather, the one who most ably represented the Black Mountain impulse—was Stein. The Williamsian "plain" scenes of Stein's poetry were invigorated by the contrast in his recitation between stressed and unstressed syllables. Thomas Meyer's love poetry showed a gift for language, too, but what he was doing among the Mountain Men was a puzzle. After this was a forum called "Is There a Black Mountain Poetry?" Richard Blevins, professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg, opened his remarks with: "Black Mountain College is dead. Long live Black Mountain poetry." His explanation for the persistence of projectivist poetry was that there is still a frontier, an American West, for everyone to "project" themselves into in their unceasing search for data. His answer to the forum's question, he declared, "is Edward Dorn's: Where is the prairie? I mean, how many leaves of grass would feed a herd of buffalo for a week?" "It's a very wide and broad avenue into the mountains," he assured us. David Matlin, a poet and playwright, also focused on buffalo in his commentary. For no apparent reason, he reported that in the 1860s buffalo were shipped down the Mississippi in barges. One couldn't help wondering if Matlin and Blevins were slyly alluding to the eventual spreading of the Olsonian gospel "down the Mississippi" and across the nation from its rural outpost at SUNY Buffalo, where, one might say, the projectivist buffalo now mainly roam. George Quasha, the publisher of Station Hill Press and a poet himself, offered the most eloquent response to the question. He said: "There was an event; the nature of that event haunts us in various ways," and this is the legacy of Black Mountain. "It was a way of being," he said, "a mode of attention" that provided people with a new way of looking at the world.

A young man in the audience who spoke up during the discussion period following the Blevins-Matlin-Quasha panel hit on what was perhaps the greatest irony of the proceedings—an irony more disturbing, finally, than that of a radical poetic movement finding a haven in the academy. This was the historicizing of a movement whose central philosophical assumption is that the present moment is the only thing that counts. (Quasha had actually touched on the issue as well in his recollection of working on the galleys of *The Maximus Poems* with Olson. How can you ever finish correcting galleys, Olson and Quasha wondered, if yesterday's perceptions are always being superseded by today's?) To discuss the past goes against the aesthetic of immediacy the projectivists espoused. "The past exists to be forgotten," Olson was quoted as saying.

The truth is, this aesthetic of immediacy —which is really an aesthetic of forgetfulness—was evident throughout the three-day conference. In the six sessions I attended (I missed Creeley's Sunday afternoon reading), one could count on one hand the references that were made to the world beyond the lecture hall. If it weren't for a glancing reference to AIDS, a mention of Nicaragua, and Albert Cook's slap at today's young formalists ("traditionalists-come-lately," he called them), one could have very easily come away from the conference thinking the last twenty years had never occurred. Today's Black Mountain poets, none of whom possess half the raw talent of Olson, have taken the cultural shortsightedness that was his major flaw and magnified it into a great, willful blindness.

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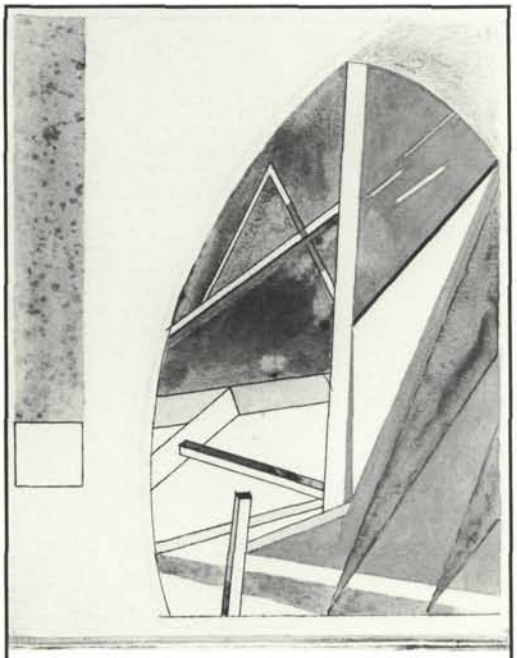

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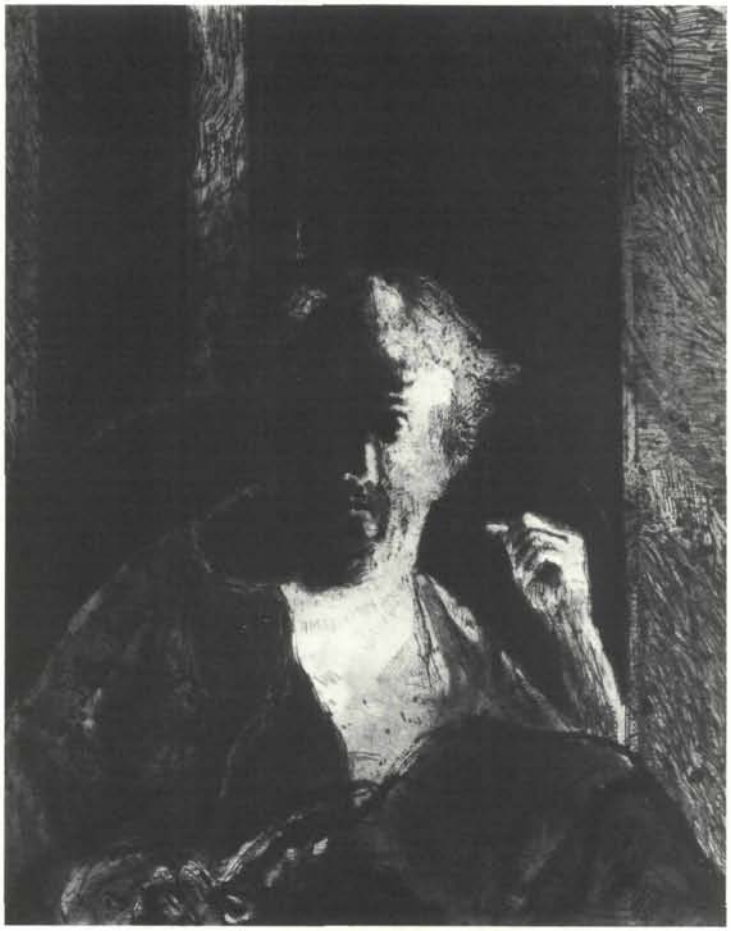

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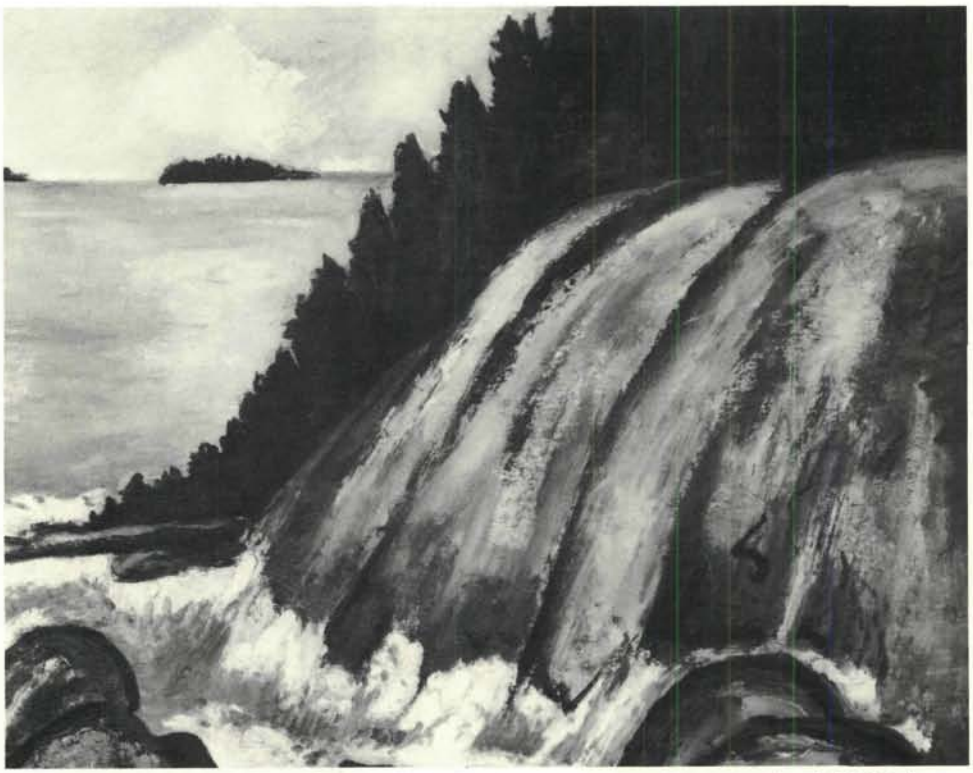

Marsden Hartley, *Calm After Storm off Hurricane Island, Vinal Haven, Maine*, 1937-38, oil on academy board, 22 x 28 inches

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